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SHORT STORIES.

No. 659.] For the Week Ending August 17th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

The blood fled from her face. For the second time she had been trapped.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

II.—A Devil's Lure.

By DONOVAN MART.

It was evening-time. Alone in the study of his palatial London house sat Horace Caldecott, his brows knit with thought, his black eyes gleaming with some hidden rage.

"So that's how the wind blows," he muttered. "Hazel Hadlow gives me the slip and rushes into the arms of Mr. Eric Monteith and his sister. She tells them her story, doubtless. And they befriend her, and escort her to a boarding-house, where she may be safe. But they little thought that the seedy tramp who dogged their footsteps this afternoon was Horace Caldecott. And now what's to be done? I've found out a good deal. Master Eric is to fetch her at eleven o'clock and escort her to Mark Danvers, the theatrical agent. He's to be her knight, is he? We'll see. Curse the girl! And yet I want her all the more now. How beautiful she is! Beside her Valerie Bellairs is positively ugly. Well, she's not seen the end of me yet. No, no! She's innocent, trusting, easy to dupe. I must think out a plan somehow. Anyhow she's safe where she is for the present. To-morrow, well—it will be Eric Monteith against Horace Caldecott, with the odds upon the latter gentleman. For, by Heaven, I'll move heaven or hell to get her in my power again! She shall be mine! She's nullified the hold I had on her through her father, but that's not the only trump in the pack! But there's a good deal to be done. I can't work the job through single-handed."

He pulled out his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock.

"H'm," he continued musingly, I'll have dinner first and then I'll go and pay an evening call upon Ben Quirk. He's the man for my money. I think with his help I'll be able to nab Miss Hazel for the second time. And she shan't give me the slip so easily again, or my name's not Horace Caldecott."

An hour later and a muffled figure might have been seen leaving Squire Caldecott's abode. It was the Squire himself. With hurried steps he made his way along the darkening streets, looking neither to the right nor to the left, pressing onward with the air of a man who had a fixed destination ahead of him.

Twenty minutes quick walking and he had reached a neighbourhood that was in direct contrast to the stately streets he had left behind him, a squalid network of alleys, one of those plague spots that infect London and all great cities, the abode of a low and ruffianly type.

He dived down a particularly unsavoury court, and stopping before a door, rapped in a peculiar fashion. In a few minutes he heard footsteps on the other side of the portal. Then the door opened furtively. "The squire?" queried a low voice.

"Yes," muttered Caldecott. "Let me in."

The door opened with a dismal creak. Caldecott slipped inside the house. It was very dark. There came a sound as of a match being struck. "This way," said the strange man.

Caldecott followed his guide into a somewhat dingy little room, the window of which was shuttered. The lessee of the apartment lit a candle. He was a small, rather wizened figure, with a humorous, clean-shaven face, and bright little eyes that twinkled cunningly from deep sockets. "To what am I indebted for this visit, squire?" he asked in a curiously well-bred voice, quite out of keeping with his surroundings.

"Business, Ben, business! And if you help me, I'll pay you well."

Ben Quirk smiled.

"Out with it then," he said.

Caldecott hesitated for a few minutes. He was evidently ill at ease. At last he found his voice.

"I came to you, Ben," he said, "because you're the only man in London who can help me. I want a man who has the appearance of a gentleman, who is well-educated and a good actor. How does that suit you for a start?"

Quirk shrugged his shoulders.

"You didn't come here only to pay compliments, Squire," he answered quietly.

Caldecott laughed. "You're right," he said, "and I'll be frank with you." He sat down on a chair. "Listen attentively," he continued, and then with quick, incisive sentences, he unfolded his base scheme.

The other heard him out attentively.

"It's a ticklish bit of business," he said, when Caldecott had finished, "and I suppose you're willing to pay for it. Ben Quirk's hands have been soiled a good many times since—well since the days when I used to sport it in Pall Mall with the best of them. How much will you stand in for the job?"

"Fifty pounds!"

Quirk's eyes glittered. "Fifty pounds let it be!" he said tersely.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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CHAPTER II.

"Here I am, really in London town, saved from the clutches of Horace Caldecott, free from the degradation of Harlow Farm. And to-day Mr. Monteith is coming for me. And he is going to take me to the agent's. I'm going to try to earn my living on the stage. I can hardly believe it's really all true."

So mused Hazel Harlow, safe beneath the roof of motherly Mrs. Bryant's lodging-house, careless of the future now that to her inexperienced, unsullied eyes, the future seemed to hold out so many golden opportunities.

How could she be otherwise than sanguine? All her short life had been spent hitherto amidst the quiet of the country, a quiet that had only held one disturbing element, the advent of Horace Caldecott into her narrow world. The universe was a sealed book to her. She knew scarcely anything of evil, did not realise the dangerous potentialities that lay in her wondrous virgin beauty, even the terrors of the day before, when she had so providentially escaped from Caldecott's clutches, had almost faded from her memory.

Her high-souled nature revolted instinctively from anything that was base or sordid. And as her standard was so high it is surely no matter for surprise that her temperament was so sunny, so confiding.

She had found friends in Eric Monteith and his sister. What could she fear from Caldecott now. The depth of a villain's cunning resources were yet to be plumbed. It was a case of hawk and pigeon.

Hazel was not so unsophisticated, however, that she did not realise that difficulties lay in the path that led to her hopes of becoming a great actress. Yet her innocence, her fresh country instincts made her view those difficulties from quite another point of view to Monteith's and his sister's.

They knew the trials and dangers that must be in the path of an unprotected girl like Hazel Harlow, a girl, moreover, who had such beauty. Long and earnestly they had discussed Hazel together on the evening of the day that had witnessed their strange meeting.

And now Hazel sat in the little sitting-room that Mrs. Bryant, her landlady, had apportioned her, weaving golden visions about the future.

It was nine o'clock. She had still two hours to wait before Eric Monteith would come to fetch her, to escort her to Mark Danvers, the theatrical agent.

Eric Monteith! The name rang pleasantly as she murmured it to herself. And Eric's handsome, open face rose up before her mental vision. She could not admit to herself that she had fallen in love with him. As yet she was not ripe for love. The future seemed too dazzlingly alluring to allow her girlish thoughts to be distracted by a man's attractions.

A knock at the door dispersed her thoughts. "Come in," she said.

The door opened to admit the pleasant face and somewhat portly figure of her landlady, Mrs. Bryant.

"Here's a note for you, miss," said the woman. "There's a man waiting for an answer."

Hazel's astonishment can be well imagined. "Who could be writing to her in London?" She opened the envelope and drew forth a letter, written in pencil in a scholarly, neat handwriting, that ran as follows:

"Dear Miss Harlow,—It is with the utmost regret that I write to you a few hurried words to ask you to be so kind as to come with the bearer of this note at once. The fact is that my sister has met with an accident. I dare not leave her as she is, and she has asked for you repeatedly. Please come with all haste. You need not say anything to Mrs. Bryant, as urgency is of the utmost importance. The messenger I have sent is thoroughly to be trusted. Yours very sincerely, Eric Monteith."

Hazel read the short note with the utmost care, and after she had mastered it, she felt that there was only one thing to be done. Her benefactress of the day before was in danger, perhaps seriously ill. It was habitual to Hazel's trusting, sympathetic nature, to show her gratitude by every means in her power; of course she would go. She hurriedly put on her hat and hastened down the stairs.

In the hall a man was standing—a small, dapper figure, who smiled encouragingly at Hazel as she approached him.

"I am very much at your service," said the girl, "from the note I have just read I am to come with you at once."

The man touched his forehead with his forefinger. "Right you are, Miss," he answered. "I've a cab outside."

He opened the door, and Hazel, following his directions, sprang into a hansom drawn up against the kerb. The little man leapt in beside her, and they were off.

"Please tell me what is the matter with Miss Monteith?" asked Hazel eagerly.

"Well, you see, Miss," answered the man with alacrity, "it's this way; Miss Monteith, than whom a better young lady never existed, is a district visitor. She set off as usual this morning after breakfast to visit some poor people not very far from her house. These people live in a very poor street as you will see for yourself. Mr. Eric, he got a message not an hour ago, to say that Miss Alice had been hurt by a falling piece of masonry. He hurried off, to find her so badly injured that she couldn't be moved yet awhile. He had promised to meet you at eleven, but of course he can't now. And Miss Monteith asked for you. She asked me to take the note."

Hazel's eyes filled with tears. Poor Miss Monteith! What a terrible accident to have befallen her! As if a visit to a theatrical agent couldn't be postponed for such a cause. Her tender heart went out towards the sorrowing brother. How poignant must his anxiety be.

The cab suddenly pulled up. "We must get out here, Miss," said the little man, "the rest of our journey—it's not far—must be done on foot. We're going into a rather unpleasant place, but you will be quite safe. No one would think of harming such a beautiful young lady as you, Miss."

So saying, the man helped Hazel to alight. Dismissing the cab, he led the way down a narrow court, which debouched, near where they had alighted, from the street. In a few moments Hazel found herself in a maze of squalid alleys, the like of which she had never in all her life seen or imagined could exist.

It was a warm morning. There were but few people about in the sordid slum with which her comrade seemed so familiar. Hazel could scarcely repress a shudder. What a horrible place. The few people she saw only added to her repugnance.

The little man at her side murmured encouraging words into her ears. "Mr. Monteith and his sister are in an upper room of this house," he said, pausing before a door, which he opened, to disclose a rather dark and grimy passage, leading to a ricketty flight of wooden stairs.

With a beating heart, yet anxious above everything to

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthral you.

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reach and be possibly of assistance to the girl who had befriended her, Hazel began to mount the stairs, the man following.

"Top of the stairs, first door on the left," the latter said in a low voice. "I'll not come in. They won't want me."

Hazel turned the door handle and entered the room, words of pitying welcome ready on her lips. In a moment it shut to behind her, being slammed back by a man standing almost against the door jamb inside the room. Not a soul save he was in the apartment!

With a cry Hazel wheeled round. The blood fled from her face! For the second time she had been trapped. She was alone once more with Horace Caldecott, whose black heart had worked out so diabolical a plot to disarm her confiding innocence.

"Once more we meet, Hazel!" the villain muttered hoarsely. "And there's no garden across which to escape here!"

Hazel stared at him for a moment as though spell-bound. Speech and action seemed frozen out of her. But it was only for a moment.

Then she sprang towards the door, and her villainous captor. "Help! help!" she screamed with all the power her lungs could give. "For pity's sake, help! help!" and her words were backed up by a scream that echoed again and again within the narrow compass of the squalid room.

Horace Caldecott uttered a cry that sounded like the snarl of a tiger. "Curse it!" he said, "keep quiet!" and his hands shot out so as to grapple the slender white throat of the hapless maiden.

CHAPTER III.

Punctually at eleven o'clock Eric Monteith presented himself at the Bryant's and inquired for Hazel.

"Miss Harlow's gone out," answered the landlady; "she have been gone about an hour."

"Gone! Where?"

"I don't know, sir. A gentleman came with a note. She drove off with a man in a cab in a great hurry!"

Eric's face blanched. His blood seemed suddenly to turn to water. "Good heavens!" he murmured. "What can it mean? Did she leave no message for me, Mrs. Bryant?"

"No, sir. But wait, I'll go up to her room. Perhaps she may have written a note and forgot to give it me."

Mrs. Bryant hurried away. She was only gone a minute or so, but to Eric it seemed hours. His heart was beset with a hundred sickening doubts and fears.

When the landlady returned, she had a piece of paper in her hand. There was a puzzled expression on her motherly face. "Read this, sir!" she said.

Eric almost snatched the note out of her hands. This is what he read, the note Hazel had received and left behind her in her haste:

"Dear Miss Harlow,

"It is with the utmost regret that I write to you a few hurried words, and ask you to be so kind as to come with the bearer of this note at once. The fact is, my sister has met with an accident. I dare not leave her as she is, and she has asked for you repeatedly. Please come with all haste. You need not say anything to Mrs. Bryant, as urgency is of the utmost importance. The messenger I have sent is thoroughly to be trusted.—Yours very sincerely, Eric Monteith."

Only one reading of this, and Eric realised the truth. Hazel had been the victim of a forgery, and there was but one man who could have perpetrated the dastardly deception, that man Horace Caldecott.

In a moment he had thrust the note into his pocket, dashed out of the house, to Mrs. Bryant's heightened astonishment, and leapt into a passing hansom. "Colbourne Terrace!" he said to the cabman, "and don't spare your horse."

The jehu, scenting a double fare, whipped up his steed, and in a few seconds Eric was dashing away towards Caldecott's house.

As the horse was urged onward his mind was working at lightning speed. Caldecott must somehow have tracked Hazel to his—Monteith's—house. He must have dogged her footsteps, how, Eric could not conceive—the ragged tramp he had noted so carelessly did not come into his mind as being connected with Caldecott—must have overheard the conversation between himself and Hazel, learnt that the girl was going to the theatrical agent's, and forestalled Eric by an hour. And now the girl was in her hated lover's power again!

Eric's blood boiled within him. He gnashed his teeth together with impotent fury. For he realised to the full now that he loved Hazel Harlow with all his heart and soul. Caldecott should pay for this black deed so sure as there was a sun in the heavens.

The cab pulled up with a jerk. "Colbourne Terrace, sir!" said the cabman through the butterfly. Eric leapt out, and thrust a heap of loose silver into the man's waiting hand.

He looked around him. Caldecott's house was a few doors beyond where the vehicle had pulled up.

And now what was to be done? Eric had no doubt in his mind, but that Hazel was within the house, and the villain Caldecott as well. Should he forcibly seek an entrance, and leave the issue of the adventure to Fate?

The young man's heart ceased beating, for a moment it seemed to him, as Caldecott's front door suddenly opened and a woman stepped out—a woman fashionably dressed.

For a moment Eric thought it was Hazel herself. In another he realised the vanity of his hope. The woman was stylish and handsome in a dark, somewhat pronounced style, but was as nothing, when compared with Hazel's glorious beauty.

The woman hesitated at the head of the steps, and looked half expectantly up and down the street. Then she caught sight of Eric, and her eyes were attracted to the young man's wild, somewhat disordered appearance.

Then Monteith sprang forward. "Pardon me, madame!" he said, raising his hat, "but is Mr. Caldecott in the house?"

The woman's face flushed.

"No," she said, "why do you ask?"

Eric hesitated. Was the woman lying? Then, almost before he realised what he had said, he blurted out, "Because he is a scoundrelly abductor, and find him I must!"

The woman uttered a slight scream, and came down the steps rapidly.

"What are you saying?" she hissed. "Horace Caldecott an abductor! Of whom?"

Eric drew himself together with an effort. "My name is Monteith," he said stiffly, "Miss"—"Bellairs," put in the woman—"Bellairs, and I have unimpeachable authority for what I say. This morning"—but at that moment a fresh interruption ensued as a cab dashed up to the door, in which were two men, the one helpless,

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with a white bandage stained with blood bound across his forehead, the other a small, wizened man with a clean shaven pale face.

At sight of the wounded man, Valerie Bellairs (Caldecott's lover and his dupe—see the story that appeared in last week's SHORT STORIES) gave vent to a scream of womanish terror. "Horace!" she cried, "and wounded—perhaps dead."

"Caldecott!" muttered Eric, with a groan. "Where then is Miss Harlow?" He pressed forward to the side of the cab.

The little man, who was indeed Ben Quirk, looked up and down the street apprehensively.

"Best get him inside the house!" he muttered.

In a moment Eric sprang forward. "You catch hold of him under the arms," he said, "I'll take his legs."

Ben Quirk shrugged his shoulders and looked somewhat hopelessly at Valerie. But she was too much concerned with Caldecott's lifeless appearance to pay any attention to Quirk's gestures. "Get him up to his own room," she said, and running up the steps of the house pealed vigorously at the bell.

The peremptory summons brought a servant to the door almost instantaneously. Caldecott, still apparently lifeless, was borne up the steps slowly by his two bearers. Eric, with suppressed loathing and a fierce desire to learn what had become of Hazel; Quirk, impassive, yet pale, each man measuring the other, as it were, with their eyes.

Caldecott was carried to his room and laid on the bed. This done, Quirk did not hesitate. Muttering something incoherent he darted from the room and away down the stairs with surprising agility.

The little scoundrel did not dare to face the music any longer.

Valerie Bellairs was bending over Caldecott, her slender white fingers seeking to ease the bandage that bound his injured head. On the other side of the bed stood Eric, gnawing his upper lip, with an expression of impotent rage upon his face. For he felt instinctively that in some way or another Caldecott's present plight and Hazel's mysterious disappearance, were bound up together.

Suddenly Caldecott moved uneasily on his couch.

"Horace!" she cried. "And wounded—perhaps dead!"

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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His lips began to move, a ghastly smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"He is delirious!" muttered Valerie, "send for a doctor in mercy's name!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the sick man. "I've got you now, Hazel! I've got you now! You won't give me the slip again! Falcon Court's not Colbourne Terrace. There's no back garden to help you here!" His ravings suddenly changed to a higher key, as with a white face Eric leant forward to catch every word that the fever-stricken wretch uttered. "Keep still, curse you! Ah, they're here! they're here! Help! help! help!" and a scream broke from the man's unconscious lips.

Valerie turned hysterically to Eric. "How can you stand like that, man?" she cried fiercely. "He's delirious! Raving! He doesn't know what he's talking about! Run for a doctor. Run, I say."

Eric drew himself up. He looked unmeaningly at the woman's white, haggard face.

"'Falcon Court,' he said!" muttered the young man. "Good God! what can it mean?" The next moment he had dashed like a man possessed out of the room, and down the broad stairs that led to the entrance-hall thronged now with startled servants.

The next moment he was in the street. Not twenty yards away was a policeman. To him Eric turned.

"Policeman!" he gasped breathlessly, "do you know Falcon Court?"

"Falcon Court," answered the man, musingly; "why, yes, that's the name of a vile slum not more than three-quarters of a mile from here."

"Then for heaven's sake come there with me at once. There's been foul play—murder, for all I know, in Falcon Court. I'll give you ten, twenty, fifty pounds if you'll come! Hie, cabby, cabby!" he called frenziedly, as a hansom trotted briskly past, to pull up abruptly at the insistent hail.

Eric almost hustled the constable inside the cab. The officer broke out into expostulation.

"Falcon Court, or as near as you can get there!" cried Monteith to the cabman. He thrust a sovereign into the policeman's hand.

"There's an earnest of my *bona fides*," he said imploringly. "A life may hang in the balance at this very moment. Or"—his young voice trembled—"we may even now be too late."

The policeman pocketed the coin and gazed wonderingly into the handsome face of his comrade. "Well, this beats anything," he muttered. Then he said aloud, "Are you armed, sir? Falcon Court isn't a place where the police are very much loved."

"We must find another constable nearer our destination," answered Eric decisively. "They can't kill the three of us, and"—with a touch of unconscious pride—"I was champion light-weight at Oxford last year."

The policeman looked admiringly at the slim, well-knit figure. "Well, what's the game, sir?" he said.

"I have reason to believe," came the rapid answer, "that a young lady was abducted this morning by a scoundrel, and lured away to Falcon Court. The man has since returned wounded and alone. Now do you see my reason for haste."

The constable let fall an oath with ready expressiveness. "A pretty game!" he muttered. "Poor girl! I hope we come in time. We'd best get out here, sir."

Eric needed no second bidding. A second policeman was standing on the kerb near at hand. Monteith beckoned to the man, and following the first constable, he plunged down a narrow court, just waiting to see that the other officer had taken his hint.

Accustomed as he was to the various phases of London life, Eric could scarcely repress a shudder as he followed the policeman down the sordid alleys that led to Falcon Court. To think of Hazel amid such surroundings seemed too terrible. And supposing that she was not there! Supposing that Caldecott had hidden her away somewhere! What could they do then?

Suddenly, just as Falcon Court—the name of the alley spoken mutteringly by the policeman who had been Eric's first guide—was reached, Monteith caught sight of a man that sent the blood racing through his veins. It was Ben Quirk, the little man who had brought Caldecott home. The man had dashed into a house. The court seemed deserted. Yet who knew what fiends in human guise lurked behind the closed doors that opened into the fœtid alley.

Eric noted the house into which Quirk had dashed. "Try here," he muttered, pausing before the closed door of the dwelling.

The policeman battered at the door with a vehemence that seemed to suddenly create a stir such as is aroused in a bee-hive when the inmates are disturbed. A suppressed hum of voices seem to break out; windows were cautiously opened; heads appeared, oaths and muttered invectives were heard.

But the door against which the trio battered, remained closed. The constables exchanged notes in whispers. Eric drew himself back preparatory to battering down the woodwork of the portal by main force. For somehow, instinct told him that behind that very door lay the solution to the enigma he had sworn to solve.

Then, as is often the case in this world of ours, the unexpected happened. The door was flung open from the inside, and a stream of men issued forth, like fluid escaping from a hole in a barrel. Cursing and swearing, the rabble nearly overwhelmed Eric and his two upholders as they swept out. The two constables drew their truncheons, and kept a way clear all round them by ample use of the same. Eric made play with his fists, standing back against the wall of the house, warding off many a blow and a kick, though not escaping sundry of the assaults made against him.

But at last, and by a miracle, as it seemed, the cowardly crew, warned doubtless by Quirk, had got clear away. The door lay open. Eric dashed inside the house, followed by the policemen, who shouted at him to be on his guard.

Regardless of their cries, he flew, as though on wings, up the ricketty staircase, and to a room above, the door of which was open. A cry escaped him. Upon the floor lay the body of a woman, upon her face, her arms stretched out in front of her, with a tangle of chestnut hair rippling down her shoulders and upon the dirty boards of the apartment.

It was Hazel! Hazel Harlow! For a moment Eric thought she was dead. A groan of agony escaped him. Then one of the policemen raised the apparently lifeless body in his strong arms.

"Don't take on, sir!" he said, "she's only fainted. My word, ain't she beautiful!"

"Only fainted," echoed Eric. "Then we were in time. Thank God! Thank God!"

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHILE all these stirring events had been happening, Alice Monteith, the unsuspecting catspaw of Caldecott's scheme, had remained quietly at home, awaiting the return of her brother after the projected visit to the theatrical agent with Hazel Harlow.

Judge of her surprise, therefore, when at about half-past two o'clock a cab drew up at the door to disgorge Eric and Hazel, the latter looking strangely white and ill.

In a moment Alice realised that something had happened. But the story that she heard a little later from Hazel's own lips far exceeded anything that she had expected to hear.

Hazel described how she had received the note purporting to come from Eric—a palpable forgery, and yet written by some educated man, not Caldecott, for, of course, Hazel would have recognised her detested lover's writing—how she had not for a moment suspected foul play; how she had been lured away, only to find herself entrapped once more by Caldecott. The rest of her story can be told in her own words:

"On seeing the man I have more reason to hate and fear than all others—the man who ruined my father; my first feelings were those of almost abject fear. Hardly knowing what I did, I screamed out with all the force of my lungs, again and again.

"My action enraged Caldecott. He seized me by the throat, to still my cries, when suddenly the door flew open, and a stream of uncouth men rushed into the room.

"In a moment Caldecott was overpowered, in spite of his struggles, and, I believe, hurt"—we have seen how he was brought home by Quirk.

"But if I had hoped that my rescuers were honourable men, my expectations were to be cruelly cast down. Never have I seen such a repulsive crew of human beings as the men who confronted me then. I uttered a silent prayer to Heaven to protect me from such awful fiends in human shape as these men appeared to be.

"Then they began asking me questions. Who was I? How had I come there? Why had I screamed, and the like. I answered them as fully as I thought fit, imploring them at the same time to let me go.

"'How much money have you got?' asked one of the men. I told him, only a few pence with me, as was true. . . .

"He swore fearfully, and then he and the other men drew apart in the corner near the door, muttering together, though I could not hear what they said. At last the ringleader came to my side:

"'Look here,' he said roughly, 'you've got no money, and you don't appear to be anybody in particular, but you've got a fine face and figure of your own'—he leered at me in a horrible manner, and I felt myself growing cold all over. I seemed to be in some terrible nightmare—'and we're going to draw lots for you!'"

Hazel paused in her narrative, and a simultaneous cry of horror broke from her two listener's lips. Eric pictured the terrible scene vividly; Hazel beautiful, pale, helpless, around her the foul scum of as foul a neighbourhood as perhaps even London could with shame own to.

"For a few moments," the girl went on, repressing a shudder with difficulty, "I could hardly realise what the man meant. Then the full purport of his words came to me.

"I was to be made the means of affording these ruffians sport. In a few moments perhaps I should find myself alone with one or another of these fearful creatures. What could I do, alone, not even knowing where I was?

"Suddenly the men withdrew. But they carefully locked the door behind them, and all hope I had of making my escape faded away. I could not have got out of the tiny window, and even if I could have done, the act would have availed me nothing.

"The minutes dragged slowly on, and I was the prey to the most sickening fears. From sounds of laughter and conversation below me, I could judge pretty accurately where my captors were. What they were doing I could only conjecture—perhaps drawing lots at that moment for me.

"At last, after, as it seemed, hours had passed away, I heard a shuffling footstep outside the door. The next moment the lock shot back and a man entered the room, a dirty, blear-eyed man, who waved a piece of grimy paper in his hand.

"'I've won!' he cried, and to my horror I saw he was drunk. 'You're mine, my beauty!'

"The room seemed to go round. I could endure no more. The next moment all was darkness. I remembered nothing further until I came to my senses to find Mr. Monteith and a couple of policemen bending over me. How you found me, Mr. Monteith, you have already made clear."

Eric drew a long breath. "That scoundrel, Caldecott," he cried, "he shall not be allowed to get off scot free. I shall go round and see him this afternoon again. He must be all right again now."

"Oh, leave him alone, Mr. Monteith," cried Hazel imploringly; "he will kill you."

"It is only defenceless girls he dare try to injure," broke in Eric impetuously. "No, I must have it out with him."

"And now, dear Miss Harlow," broke in Alice Monteith, "let me beg of you to abandon this project of going on the stage; let——"

But Hazel interposed. "Miss Monteith," she said proudly, "I can't thank you enough for all you and your brother have done for me, but, believe me, I am more resolved than ever now to earn my own bread. I am sure that I have the makings of an actress, and I am not daunted by what Squire Caldecott has done. It has been a rude awakening for a country girl—this advent to London—but it has taught me a lesson. I shall not be caught again like that."

The girl spoke eagerly, almost defiantly. Alice Monteith sighed. As for Eric he could not trust himself to speak. The love that had arisen in his heart for Hazel seemed to grow stronger every moment. And yet how powerless he was. He could not even give voice to his love. And he knew, in spite of Hazel's brave words, that the dangers in the path of the girl, so beautiful, and withal so innocent and confiding, were manifold. He knew, moreover, that there were trials and tribulations that not even his strong young arm and passionate love would be able to avert.

"To-morrow, Mr. Monteith," Hazel pursued gently, "if your forbearance has not already been too severely tried, I will still ask you to accompany me to the agent's. And to-morrow I will not move from Mrs. Bryant's until you yourself come for me."

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"Then we cannot persuade you to stay with us?" asked Alice.

Hazel coloured. "I owe you so much already," she said quietly, "that I could not dream of trespassing so much upon your goodness."

There was something in the girl's voice that convinced her listeners that she did not speak thus out of mere coquetry. The speech was no honeyed politeness, such as *convenance* so often demands. Coquetry and Hazel Harlow were strangers.

Eric without further words slipped out of the room. He did not say whither he was bound. He merely asked Hazel to wait until he came back in an hour or so, when he would once more escort her to Mrs. Bryant's.

But his destination lay not far away. It was to Caldecott's house that he turned his steps. He rang the bell peremptorily. A page in buttons opened the door.

"I wish to see Mr. Horace Caldecott," said Eric haughtily.

"Mr. Caldecott is not at home, sir," said the boy.

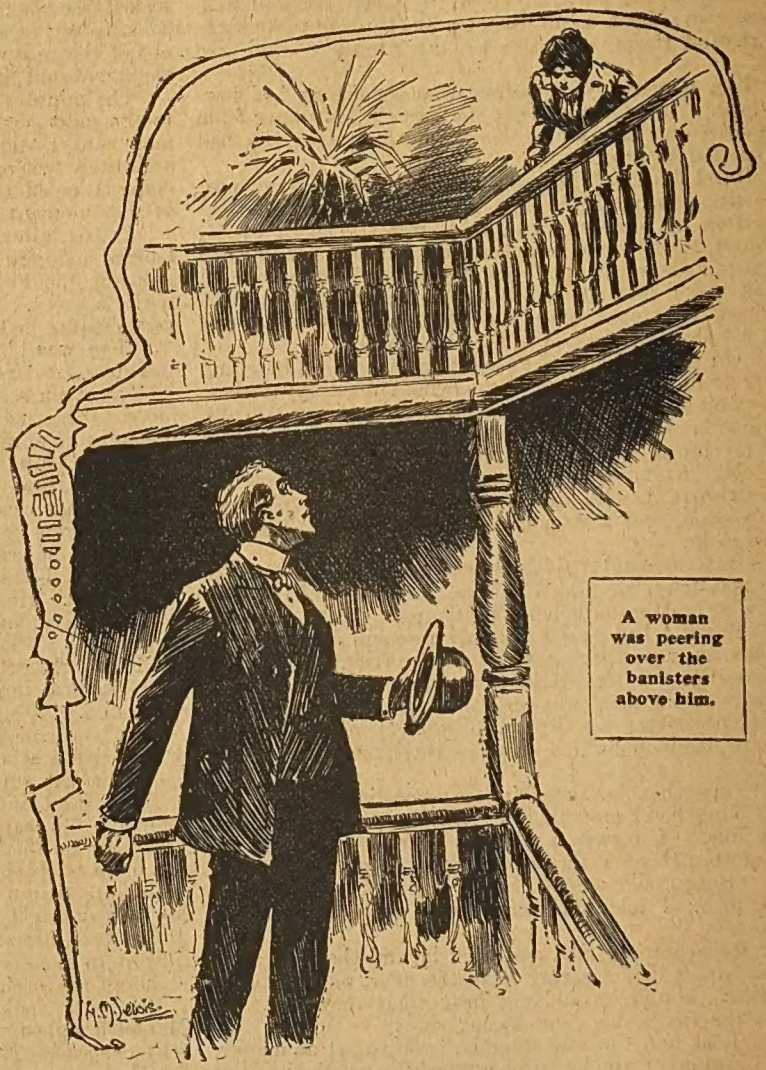
"I don't believe it," answered Eric coolly.

The page-boy was too astonished at the unexpected answer to make any retort himself.

Eric, taking advantage of the boy's amazement, slipped inside the house. "I'm going up to Mr. Caldecott's room," he said calmly.

He put his foot upon the bottom-most step of the broad flight of stairs leading up to the room where he had helped to carry Caldecott a few hours before. With a few quick strides he reached the first landing of the stairs. Here he paused, for a woman was peering over the banisters above him, the same woman with whom he had conversed when Caldecott had been brought home—Valerie Bellairs.

"What are you doing here?" the woman said, in a whisper almost, though every word was heard by the man below. "Have you come back to gloat over Horace Caldecott?" She beckoned to Eric. "Come," she said imperiously. "Come and see the room where you helped to lay him. You needn't fear his delirium now."



A woman was peering over the banisters above him.

There was something strangely insistent about Valerie's manner. Impelled by sudden curiosity Eric followed her directions. She threw open the door of the room in which Caldecott had been placed by Monteith and Quirk.

The chamber itself was empty. Eric's astonishment was visible in every line of his countenance.

A mocking laugh fell from Valerie's lips.

"So you thought to find him here, did you?" she said in a curiously restrained tone. "Well, you see your mistake. Horace Caldecott is *not* here. He has been taken to a place of safety by my orders. And now listen to me very carefully, Mr. Eric Monteith—you see I know you. This girl that calls herself Hazel Harlow, who has been responsible for all this, for Horace's sudden lapse of allegiance to myself—this country wench— thinks of going on the stage.

"Well, let her go. But remember, she has Valerie Bellairs to reckon with. Perhaps you'll think of that in a few days. Anyhow, I warned you. Don't forget that."

Eric drew back a few paces. His frank eyes blazed with rage.

"And so you are in league with the hound Caldecott," he said, "you, who call yourself a member of the *gentler* sex, are bound with a villain to endeavour to wreck the life of a girl who is as pure as she is beautiful, whose only fault is her stainless beauty. Well, as you say, forewarned is forearmed. This is not the first case on record where criminal jealousy and hopeless lust have been ranged on the same side against purity. As for Horace

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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Caldecott, tell him that I will not rest until I have given him the horse-whipping he deserves."

Valerie's coal-black eyes contracted. Her limbs trembled with suppressed rage.

"Say another syllable," she hissed, "and I will call the servants of the house to have you 'chucked out.' I will give Horace Caldecott your message. And remember he is not friendless, neither is he poor. You will find that threat to give a horsewhipping cost you somewhat dear, Mr. Eric Monteith!"

Eric realised that he could gain no more good by prolonging the interview with Valerie Bellairs. He realised that Caldecott, if he were in the house, which was unlikely, would not be found by talking to this woman. He turned on his heel and left the room.

He met with no opposition as he descended the stairs and walked across the broad entrance-hall and out into the street.

Yet one thing he realised poignantly. He had, by his somewhat ill-advised visit, stirred up a veritable hornets' nest of vindictiveness against himself. For that he cared but little. What could Caldecott and Company do to injure him.

And if his visit had been ill-advised it had at least taught him one thing, and that was that in Valerie Bellairs, Hazel had now a most implacable and unscrupulous enemy.

Eric ground his teeth together in impotent despair. Would nothing suffice to divert Hazel from her fixed resolve to seek fame and fortune upon the stage? Would not even the portrayal of the scene between himself and Valerie Bellairs serve to convince the girl of the hopelessness of her aspirations? In his heart of hearts Eric knew that it would not.

Yet he determined to leave no stone unturned in his endeavour to dissuade Hazel from her purpose. If only she would marry him, slight though their acquaintance had been! He could then snap his fingers in Caldecott's face. And the most beautiful, the most adorable maiden he had ever seen would be his, while there would be no obstacle in the way of her taking her proper place in the world as the wife of a young and wealthy gentleman.

Hazel and Alice were still discussing the events that had just transpired when Eric returned.

To his sister the young man had made the somewhat strange request that she would allow him five minutes private conversation with Hazel.

To this demand Alice made no demur. As soon as Hazel and he were alone, Eric came to the point.

"Miss Harlow," he said breathlessly, "will you marry me?"

For a moment Hazel was too astonished to find an answer. When she did there was no mistaking her words.

"I cannot, Mr. Monteith," she said. "I do not love you in the way I think a girl ought to care for the man who is to be her husband. And besides, you have known me for such a short time."

"Yes," answered Eric moodily, "and yet I love you with all my heart and soul. I had hoped that you might have cared for me enough to have promised to think of becoming my wife. And, besides——"

"You wanted to find a pretext for dissuading me from a theatrical life," broke in Hazel, with something suspiciously like a smile playing about her lips.

Eric coloured. "Yes," he answered, somewhat constrainedly, "that is so, though it doesn't make any difference to my love. Believe me," he continued, with increased earnestness, "I am convinced that a hundred dangers and difficulties lie in the road that leads to your becoming a great actress. Will nothing make you swerve from your fixed determination? Put all that I have just said about myself on one side. Think of the terrible experience that you have just gone through——"

"And which your bravery alone has rescued me from, and worse." Hazel's eyes filled with tears. "You must think me most horribly ungrateful," she said piteously, "and yet something within me urges me to go on, to persevere in spite of all. Whether you consent to help me or not, I must go on now." And Hazel held out her hand with an imploring gesture.

Eric seized the little hand and pressed his lips to it.

"Come what may," he said fervently, "hate me, or love me—I had rather the latter—I will serve you to the best of my abilities. If you feel that the only course before you is that of endeavouring to go upon the stage I will help you all I can. And I can say the same for my sister. We are alone in the world. So forget what I have just said—for the present. I can't help loving you, Miss Harlow. I'm afraid I shall do so all my life. But I won't worry you with my attentions."

And thus did Eric Monteith promise to aid Hazel Harlow in her efforts to woo the histrionic muse. He had rescued her from death, or from worse than death, and yet the way before him seemed black and fraught with danger. What those dangers were time alone could show.

Hazel Harlow is now about to embark upon the sea of stage life. How her first efforts are rewarded will be told in a thrilling tale in next week's SHORT STORIES.

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HIS NECKLACE.

"BUT the idea is absurd!"

"Is it? Well, the evidence is against him."

"Uncle!"

"Great-uncle," corrected the old gentleman, interrupting her shortly.

"You surely cannot mean to say that you actually believe Robert, my husband, to be guilty of stealing those paltry gems—stealing that paltry necklace while enjoying your hospitality!" protested the young wife indignantly and yet almost tearfully, like one who knows that what she is endeavouring to scout is the firm belief, nevertheless, of the person to whom she is talking.

She had used the word "paltry" to express her opinion that it was not likely that Robert would stoop to theft, not in reference to the value of the necklace, but old James Bull, who was suffering from an attack of gout and was an irascible individual at the best of times, interpreted the term as a depreciation of the ornament.

"Paltry!" he echoed. "It cost—never mind—and it belonged to one whom I—er—liked very much."

A softer expression passed over his face, and Lucy Marks took advantage of a momentary weakness.

"Uncle," she said tenderly, "Robert likes me very much."

"He'd be an idiot if he didn't," was the discouraging reply.

"And I like him very much indeed," continued poor Lucy, hoping to bring her great uncle to a more tractable frame of mind."

"And I don't—and never did!" screamed Bull.

He had not intended to shout it out in that way, but a twinge of his enemy made him lose control of himself.

"It's no use talking any more about it," continued Bull an instant later, when he was more at ease. "I don't want a crying woman in my room; the gout is quite enough to put up with at one time—it claims all my attention and more patience than I possess. You may talk about the absurdity of it, and about the awkward and undignified position of a man who is virtually a prisoner in his own room, and all that, but I wouldn't lose that necklace for a lot of money. The evidence is against him, and I never had any opinion of him. A weak-minded fellow like that——"

"I will not stay to hear my husband vilified," cried Lucy proudly. Her eyes were still wet with tears, but they flashed indignation and defiance at her relative.

"You will be sorry one day for your injustice to him—and me!" And she left her uncle to his own reflections and the gout.

"I like the girl's spirit," muttered the master of the house when Lucy had passed through the doorway. "I can't help believing the fellow guilty and yet I'm sorry for her sake. Shall I let the matter go? I really feel inclined to do so on her account, but I don't believe she would consent to have it hushed up. That's the contrary nature of women. I suppose I must declare that I think him to be perfectly innocent and let them both go about freely while the affair is being investigated. That would give him a chance of disposing of the things and clearing himself. And I *don't* think him innocent!"

It certainly was a peculiar situation. Lucy had been left an orphan at an early age, and her grandfather had taken charge of her; he had died within a year and Lucy was handed over to the tender mercies of her grandfather's bachelor brother, who was some years younger.

James Bull had behaved handsomely towards the girl, and had brought her up in a style befitting a young woman who was to inherit a considerable sum, for he intended to leave all his money to her. He was very fond of her in his autocratic way.

He settled a yearly sum upon her when she was nineteen, and expected that she would make a good marriage; but, to his dismay and anger, she set her affections on a man whom Bull regarded as ineligible from the first moment, and married him in spite of the old gentleman's protests.

"I do not wish to appear ungrateful, and I am ready to renounce the money you have settled on me," Lucy told him. "I love Robert and I shall be happy with him. You have often said that your only desire is for my happiness, uncle."

So the marriage took place, and James Bull increased the amount of the settlement, but his dislike to Robert Marks remained.

The chief reason for the antipathy was the weakness of Marks' character, an almost unpardonable sin in the eyes of a man of such indomitable will as James Bull. This weakness had caused Marks to sow various wild oats in the past and to waste his patrimony.

Lucy had settled some heavy debts before her marriage. Robert had not—so much must be said to his credit—courted her for her money, but had asked her to wait until he had gained a position which he could ask her to share.

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He was an artist—or "thought he was," as Bull put it—and hoped to do great things; but Lucy, with just a touch of her uncle's will, had insisted on using her own money. What did it matter if they loved one another and were soon to have all things in common? she argued. But that did not improve Bull's opinion of Robert Marks.

Marks worked at his profession, but the results were not satisfactory. After a while he was led into various excesses, which Lucy always screened from the eyes of others, and of which Robert always repented for a time. Lucy's love in no way diminished, and this caused her to see his faults in a less glaring light than other people.

When their little son was old enough to toddle about and to talk in baby fashion, old Bull's heart warmed towards the child, and the result was that the little family spent most of their time with James Bull at his house in the country.

It was during one of these extended visits that the untoward incident occurred that gave rise to the conversation just recorded. The old gentleman, in a confidential mood, had shown to his relatives an old-fashioned diamond necklace, which he seemed to prize very much. He had merely explained that it had come into his possession many years previously from a friend, and that it was worth a great deal. When they had finished admiring it he had said that he "must put it back into his room," and had left them with that object.

However, on reaching his room, he suddenly remembered that he had omitted to instruct his man, who was about to make a special journey to the market town to bring back something which he wanted particularly, so he left the case on his table and hurried out.

He forgot the case till the next morning, when he found it open and the necklace gone. Then he remembered that, as he was hobbling back to his bedroom after breakfast, he had met Robert on the threshold and evidently coming out of the room. The artist became confused, and the old man had passed him without a word, much annoyed at the presumption of the artist in entering a private apartment secretly.

Two hours later, when he thought of the necklace and found it gone, this incident naturally aroused his suspicions. He summoned Robert and Lucy to his room—his gout was now giving him great pain—told them of the loss, and bluntly asked the artist what he had been doing in the room.

Robert admitted that he had noticed the case through the open door and had taken another look at the ornament. Bull, now in acute pain, furious at the loss and bitterly prejudiced against Robert, accused him of taking the necklace.

Of course, there was a great to-do—angry and unfounded remarks from Bull, hot protests from Robert, and tearful entreaties from Lucy that her uncle would be more feeling and reasonable. But the old man, in the agony of gout, persisted in his angry denunciations, and ordered Robert to keep to his room and not leave till the mysterious affair had been sifted.

Bull summoned the local police superintendent in order that a thorough search of the house might be made, and it was while he was waiting for the arrival of this functionary that Lucy made her last attempt to relieve her husband from his undignified position, as we have narrated.

"What does he say?" asked Robert Marks anxiously as his wife entered.

"He will not relent, dear," half sobbed Lucy. "He says that nobody except us two knew of the existence of that necklace, and that the case is exactly like another which he sometimes has on his table and which contains a curious pipe, so that no one else would be attracted by the case as they would think it contained that pipe. He says he did it on purpose. I thought it was a peculiar case for such a thing, and it was certainly much newer than the necklace," she added with a touch of feminity.

"But it's preposterous!" cried Robert. "I'll not submit to it!"

"The matter must be cleared up or the stigma will cling to us for ever—even if he goes no farther than keeping you in your room for the present, Robert dear."

"But he would never dare to hand me over to the police if he does not find it!" gasped the artist.

"He will find it. It must be cleared up," said Lucy. And then she allowed her tears to have full sway.

"I was a fool to go into his room to look at it without asking his permission," groaned Robert, "but it occurred to me that it would suit for a picture I'm thinking of painting, and I wanted another glimpse to make sure, and I thought, as I saw the thing on the table, that I could just glance at it without worrying him. He's such a queer man and seems to have a grudge against me."

He pondered for a while and then started to his feet as a light dawned upon him.

"Yes, I've been a bad lot. I'm a weak fool, led away by any pleasant companion, and I've wronged you, Lucy. I can see it now. My career hasn't been creditable, though I've never done anything really wrong, and the old man despises me and is ready to believe anything. But he is a wicked old man to think I could do *that!*"

Husband and wife were so full of their trouble that they did not notice the presence of their four-year-old son, who had entered while his father had been speaking. Little Dick stood amazed, glancing from one to another, not knowing whether to cry or not. After a few seconds his hesitation vanished, and he stole away to confer with his friend and playmate, James Bull.

That worthy had just been interviewed by the police superintendent, to whom he had related his loss, but without mentioning the object of his suspicions, and to whom he had given orders to make a search of the apartments, including all private ones.

"I must have that necklace," he concluded, "and if you can recover it, in the house or out of it, I'll give you something that will make you happy."

So the officer had commenced his search. It was rather irregular, perhaps, but James Bull was a notability in the district, and he was rich. And the old man sat in suspense, expecting, yet dreading, to hear the footsteps of the child he had grown so fond of during the past two years. Ah, he was coming.

"Mummie's crying and daddie's——"

The youngster blurted out this intelligence as he pushed open the door, then he stopped and appeared to be on the point of crying himself.

"Come here, Dick," said old Bull. His voice was husky and his face wore a worried expression that might have been due to gout twinges.

The child approached him and waited to hear more, but as Bull did not speak, the child continued:

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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"Daddie says he's a wicked ole man. An' he is if he makes mammie cry." The boy began to whimper, "Who is wicked, grandads?"

"H'm!" coughed Bull. It was a delicate question, but the child unconsciously relieved him from the necessity of answering by placing his hand rather heavily, so it seemed, on the gouty member, and causing Bull to cry out more in anticipation than in actual pain.

"You mustn't touch that tootie, Dick; it hurts."

It would have amused the old man's former business friends to hear him talking baby language.

"But w'y does she cry?" persisted the child. "An' who is wicked?"

Bull felt that he must say something, for the child's eyes were fixed on him with innocent confidence. "Grandads" always helped him and told him things.

"I've lost something, Dick," he began awkwardly, scarcely knowing what he was saying; "something out of that box."

Then he stopped, hoping that this would satisfy the child. He could not tell him that *he* was the wicked old man or anything more connected with the affair.

The child's eyes followed the direction of the finger, then he ran from the room as quick as his little legs would carry him. He returned in three minutes, out of breath and holding something in both hands, something that made James Bull stare and turn red and pale in quick succession.

"I fo'got it, grandads. I'se very sorry, 'cos I didn't ask," said the child contritely.

"Did you take it out of that case?" demanded Bull hoarsely.

"Yes," replied Dick, frightened at the hoarse tone and beginning to cry.

"It's all right, Dick; don't cry, but tell me all about it," remarked the old man with assumed cheerfulness.

Reassured, the child told him all in response to questions artfully put. He had walked into his "grandfather's" bedroom, as he often did, and had opened the case which his father had not shut properly. Old Bull recognised that this was a natural action, for he had humoured the child in many ways. Attracted by the brilliancy of the ewels, he had taken them away to play with, as he hadj been allowed to do with any other unimportant effe cts belonging to Bull, but he had placed the necklace with his toys and had forgotten it.

No man ever felt in a worse fix than James Bull did at that moment but his iron will acted against himself just as promptly as in any other situation it would have done for or against anybody or anything else. In an instant he had summoned a man servant and bade him fetch Robert and Lucy.

"And tell that superintendent that he needn't look any farther and I'll see him to-morrow," adding under his breath with charming inconsistency: "I suppose the noodle has poked his nose into everybody's business by this time.

"I'm a fool and I've been unjust," was his remark as Lucy entered, followed by Robert.

After that confession he was able to explain more easily. Robert and Lucy frankly accorded the forgiveness asked for by James Bull, and as for Dick's share—well, they could not find it in their hearts to blame the child.

"It was a rough experience," observed Robert, "but it has done some good. We shall know ourselves and one another better after this."

Here are some of the Cities and Towns where Hazel Harlow's Adventures will occur:

SCARBOROUGH,
SHEFFIELD,
NEWCASTLE,
RUGBY,
BELFAST,
DUBLIN,
BIRMINGHAM,
BRISTOL,
PORTSMOUTH,
LEEDS,
MANCHESTER,
NOTTINGHAM,
EDINBURGH.

Look out for when she visits your district.

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

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A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING.

"Please, sir, there's 'er lady wants to see you."

It was our office boy, who had broken in on my labours with his customary affability, not to say impudence, and even in my preoccupation I could not fail to discern that something or other about my unexpected visitor had stimulated his somewhat vulgar notions of humour.

"A lady, George! What sort of lady? I am busy. Tell her to leave her message. It is only a manuscript, I expect."

"I don't think so, sir," retorted the lad. "She said it was a very important personal matter, and she must see you."

"What does she look like?" I queried irritably, for really the interruption was annoying.

George sniggered mirthfully.

"Rather as if she had been on the tiles all night, sir, 'aw, 'aw! Prodmore said she'd want to tap you for a bob."

Prodmore was rather a low-class little brute of a clerk, and as I began to discern something of what had been going on in the office concerning the matter, I got more irritated than ever.

"Prodmore should be an excellent judge of that condition, certainly," said I, with crushing dignity. "Tell him, with my compliments, to pay more attention to his work, and less to matters which do not concern him, and put the visitor in the waiting-room!"

George retired whistling, with an easy unconcern, and afar off down the passage I heard a ribald chuckle escape him. Finishing the bit of work that was immediately engaging my attention, I allowed the sportive imp to follow my directions, and then I changed my coat for one a trifle more respectable and went down to interview the caller, whose appearance was so abnormal as to enlist the interest of a clerk in an office where callers pass in and out in a steady stream the whole day long.

My word! I didn't wonder at the mirth of George, nor the critical interest displayed by the unseemly Prodmore, though the thing was a long way from being amusing to me. Seedy journalists and penniless authors in varying stages of decay had passed through that waiting room, but never, it is safe to say, had it been graced or disgraced by such a disreputable, rakish old woman as I found waiting for me in a state of nervous excitement. A shabby old green velveteen dress hoisted on anyhow terminated in a pair of decent though broad-toed and evidently masculine boots, and was surmounted by a frowsy, moth-eaten fur, and a bonnet in the last stages of decay. A black-dotted veil hid the face from view; but it did not require an expert physiognomist to judge the lumpish, evil, dissipated features that its removal would discover.

My first idea was to beat a strategic retreat and be providentially out "for the rest of the day"; but ere I could put my purpose into action the door was flung open; and my visitor was pulling me into the room in a hysterical burst of welcome and explanation.

"Oh, Bob, I'm jolly glad to see you! What a deuce of a time you've been."

"Madam," said I, coldly unresponsive, "really I——!"

"Don't be a fool, Bob," interrupted the lady frantically. "I'm Murphy—you know, Cousin Murphy—and I'm in a deuce of a hole."

"You're what?" I stammered, and then, as my respectable fool of a relative hauled up her veil, the idiotic nature of the situation struck me and I subsided into a chair in a wild abandon of mirth.

"I don't see anything to laugh at, myself," protested Murphy, with chilling dignity; "but perhaps when you have done enjoying your evidently humorous appreciation of my unfortunate situation you will not mind lending me some little assistance."

"You—you look such an ass," said I, by way of explanation, between my bursts of laughter.

"Thanks," said he, more gruffly than ever. "Sort of reflection, I suppose—holding mirror up to nature and all that sort of thing. Hang it, I wish I was back home in Essex. Your confounded city seems to be populated by thieves and fools in about fair proportions."

"Don't get shirty, old man," said I soothingly. "What's wrong, anyhow, and why to mix in such doubtful society has the estimable Murphy wandered from his rural residence in the garb of a—er—lady? Fancy-dress ball gone wrong, was it, or just fleeing from your creditors disguised in drink and other things?"

"Drink! I haven't so much as seen an egg-cup of water nor a biscuit since yesterday," observed Murphy, forgetting his indignation in the new train of reflection called forth by my chance allusion. "You haven't a drop of whisky handy, have you?"

I hadn't; but there are means of satisfying such legitimate cravings at hand, even in newspaper offices, and while it was being procured Murphy waded in and gave me a concise and fairly lucid account of all that had befallen him since, in a misguided moment, he left his native village to come up and transact some business in the great metropolis.

You will mention "Short Stories" to your friends, won't you?

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It began the previous afternoon, and in the Post Office station of the Twopenny Tube, of all places. Murphy landed in London at twelve, and, after lunching at the "Woolpack," in Cheapside, he transacted his business and then went on to Holborn to make a few purchases of a domestic nature. Coming back his eye caught the station of the new line, and as the fame of the Tube had travelled even as far down as Wickford where he lives, he immediately conceived the idea of a short trip on it for the sake of the experience.

At the bottom of the lift he threaded his way through the tiled passages, filled with wonder and appreciation, and was about to enter the train when a foxy-looking gentleman rushed up to him, looked at him irresolutely, and then putting a weighty black bag of the Gladstone order into his hands, whispered: "Tottenham Court Road, and look fly—Splits is on to us. Bill will meet you there," and was gone again before Murphy could quite take in what had happened.

Murphy's chief feeling was one of resentment. Who was Bill, and why particularly should he "look fly" (whatever that might be), and what were "splits," and why, above all, should he be expected to act as light porter for casual strangers without a word of apology or explanation? His first idea was to put the bag, which was securely locked, and very heavy, under the seat and abandon it to its fate; and it would have been well for Murphy had he done so. But on reflection he felt that a mistake had been made, and since the bag might contain valuables, such a course might be productive of great loss and inconvenience, and so dutifully he went on to Tottenham Court Road, and struggled along to the lift and, perspiring freely in the effort, managed to drag his burden into the street.

Barely did he get there, when a gentleman of somewhat coarse exterior, and rough in manner, passed him, and, after furtively scrutinising Murphy first and then the bag, turned back.

"Come on," he whispered. "It's all right so far, but things are looking dicky."

"Are you Bill?" demanded Murphy, with a sudden inspiration.

"Right, cully! Come on," and the summary stranger turned and dived through the traffic with Murphy, his few wits scattered to the winds by the rapidity of the odd adventure, struggling after him.

Happily, for the bag was heavy (as Murphy forcibly insisted on my recognising) he had not far to go, and in a dingy side street, before a dingy house, his guide drew up, let himself in with a latch-key, and beckoned Murphy to come in without any undue delay. This Murphy did, and to his consternation and uneasiness the man paused to bolt and bar the front door, and when this was done to his satisfaction, he led my cousin downstairs into a sort of underground kitchen which was sparsely furnished with a deal table and a few plain chairs and some odd domestic utensils of the commonest order.

"Half a mo, and let's see what they've sent?" observed the man. "It was a close shave, but I think they must have got it all away by now."

Murphy's uneasiness, which had been steadily growing, culminated as the guide unlocked the bag and turned out on the table—just ordinary common building bricks.

"What the deuce?" began the astounded man, and then he paused and gazed at the contents of the bag first, and then at Murphy.

Brickbats evidently was not what he had been expecting to receive.

"I—I—I—," began Murphy with a stammer, and then he stopped dead, for, with a smothered ejaculation the other jumped to his feet and had Murphy covered with a suggestive looking revolver. "I mean," he continued, screwing up all the courage he could muster in a desperate endeavour to straighten the affair out before it assumed dangerous proportions, "I think there is some mistake."

"I hope not," responded the other with an unpleasant emphasis. "Who are you, and how did you get here?"

"You brought me," protested Murphy with some assertion. "I'm sure I didn't wish to come. Somebody, a friend of yours, possibly, pushed that bag into my hands at the Post Office station and told me to bring it to someone named Bill at Tottenham Court Road."

"The blundering fool," muttered the gentleman behind the revolver. "Well, look here, mister, you ain't a 'split' unless you are a darned sight more artful than you look; but you may be a 'nark' so mind what you are up to. There has been some little mistake here. You ain't unlike a gentleman we expected to meet, and my pal, being in a hurry, may have took a liberty. If so it's unfortunate for you, because I'm going to take another—lots of 'em maybe—and as I am a bit impatient look out that you don't worry me in case this happens to go off and hurt you."

Murphy said he'd be very, very careful. He said it feelingly, as though he really meant it, and I have no doubt he did, because even a brave man might object to be turned into a target for casual revolver practice in a dingy cellar without any compensating balance, and Murphy is far from being a brave man. What he chiefly wanted was to get out and go straight back home; but to this modest request, when he put it, his captor laughed frankly if somewhat cynically. His fitful mirth speedily gave place to ferocity again, for at that juncture an emphatic knocking at the front door above made itself heard.

"That's the police, or I'm a Dutchman," observed the fellow, more to himself than to Murphy. "Now look alive and hustle yourself into those, and—mark me!—if you say a word or give a sign, I'll shoot you dead." As he spoke he flung some articles of feminine attire at Murphy's feet, and my cousin, too dazed even to think for himself, abjectly donned them, while the other repacked the bricks, and fastened up the bag. "Now, then, hurry along. Put on the bonnet and veil, and, remember, not a word. I'll do all the talking necessary. Coming, you silly fellow; don't be in such a hurry."

This last was to the impatient caller, who was making the knocker play stentorian demands for admittance in his impatience at the delay.

The man left the room, and returned shortly afterwards closely followed by a police inspector.

"William Simon?" he queried brusquely.

"That's me, sir, and this is my missus," said the man, with leering insolence, all his ferocity having seemingly given place to the most humane and benevolent kindliness of heart and innocence of purpose. "We was just going out, and as we have a train to catch, perhaps you wouldn't mind hurrying up your business. Sorry to——"

"That will do," retorted the other. "Where's the man who called here half-an-hour ago."

"Man—who—called—here," repeated Mr. Simon thoughtfully. "I don't——"

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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"Yes, you do," said the inspector. "He brought a bag from the Tottenham Court Road Station——. Ah! got you."

The inspector's sharp eyes had alighted on the bag, and in a moment he had opened it, oblivious of the protests and entreaties of the custodian. When he saw the contents his jaw fell, and Mr. Simon grew aggressive and resentful in proportion.

"Them bricks are made by a new patent what me and a friend have discovered," he observed darkly. "And maybe you won't hear a bit more about this, Mr. Inspector. My missus here is a witness, and though I won't say there is any harm done yet the principle of violating a man's secrets in this way is against the law. What did you expect to find, dynamite or snyde coin?"

The inspector chewed his lips, and looked so thoroughly the fool he must have been feeling, that Murphy, despite his misery and precarious position, was constrained to snigger.

"You make the bloomin' missus laugh at you, and I don't wonder," observed Mr. Simon casually. "Now then, hurry up, because we wants to be off. You can have a look round if you like," he added generously. "Undo the oven door, Sal, and let the gentleman have a look there; or maybe he'd like to turn out the copper, or look in the coal-'ole."

The "gentleman" wouldn't, and with a mumbled apology or explanation he turned and left the room, followed by the tenant, who bantered him all the way to the front-door, and fired a Parthian shot at him from the doorstep. Then, returning, Murphy's captor made a few hurried preparations, and hustled my dumbly protesting and oddly reluctant relative out of the house.

"Best take my arm, Sal," said he with a grin. "It'll look affectionate and more natural like, and besides, it'll be handier in case——"

He broke off abruptly; but the significant manner in which he tapped the pocket in which Murphy knew the revolver reposed was enough in itself to exact servile unquestioning obedience.

It must have looked lovely! I told Murphy I'd have sprung a pound to see it, but he only scowled, so I was constrained to chuckle in isolated glee over the mental picture I immediately conjured up of Murphy in that absurd guise perambulating the Tottenham Court Road, arm in arm with a disreputable gentleman who was evidently well known to the police. Murphy couldn't trust in his disguise as implicitly as he might well have done, and at first it was a matter of real surprise to him that he attracted not the slightest notice from the people they encountered during the walk. Not being particularly well acquainted with London, he had no idea where

The door was flung open and my visitor was pulling me into the room.

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his guide led him. He noticed Wardour Street placarded on a big stone building at the corner of a street they passed, and from that and the time occupied, I judged that it must have been somewhere round Soho that Murphy was taken.

It was a dingy old house up a court, and for the first time since he had walked so complacently into this odd series of misadventures, Murphy jibbed. The place, he explained to me, looked "cut-throaty," and he had a preference for dying on the doorstep if he had got to die at all. A vicious dig in the ribs soon brought him to his senses, however, and under the refreshing influence of this he allowed himself to be propelled through the door, which opened mysteriously without sound or signal being given, and closed as mysteriously after they were inside, to find himself in a mixed and mysterious company of men.

A witty gentleman in a velveteen coat and a choker sang "Never Introduce Your Donah to a Pal," and complimented Murphy in somewhat broad terms on his personal charms. Another member of the company, with an eye to business, manifested a keen anxiety over his personal possessions, and seeing that he wore a twenty-guinea lever, to say nothing of a fair supply of spare cash, Murphy was not unmindful of his obligation when his companion promptly and effectively interfered.

"None of that, Saunders," said he tersely. "The gent is fair dealing, and don't mean us no harm. He has come along here to oblige me, and we don't need to give him any personal reason for wanting to come back later and pay us another visit with company which, maybe, we'd not care overmuch about meeting. Seen anything of Tom?"

They hadn't, and there as far as Murphy was concerned the mystery ended. Precisely why he should have been saddled with a bag of bricks first, and then dragged in ridiculous garb from one house to another in the way he had been, was quite beyond his comprehension. Nor did he have any further chance of investigating the affair, for shortly afterwards he was hustled into a dusty old lumber-room, and securely locked up there until far into the next morning. Faint from want of food and cowed and thoroughly demoralised, Murphy was then released by the gentleman who had been addressed as "Saunders," and, gowned and bonnetted as he was, was led forth for another perambulating trip round London. He had lost interest in everything by this time. The traffic and people in the streets seemed misty and intangible, like a dream, and he walked on in this dazed condition until he suddenly realised that his companion had discreetly vanished and left him to his own devices. Despite the taboo extended to his property, sundry other things had vanished as well, including all his money, though his watch, perhaps because it was deemed too risky, had been spared to him. Wandering along aimlessly, Murphy found himself at length in Holborn, and then pulling himself together a bit he remembered me in his time of need, with the result that I have already set down.

Fed and rested, and once more restored to his normal unintelligent frame of mind, Murphy, assisted by myself, made up a parcel of his disreputable raiment, and together we cabbed it down to Scotland Yard, and had an interview with the officials there. The result was not particularly gratifying, though it served to provide us with a reasonable theory in explanation of the comedy, and Murphy came in handy for helping to identify "Tom" (who had been captured on leaving the station with a bag of nefarious implements, including a supply of spurious coin) with the gentleman who had so casually enlisted his services the day before.

The bag found in the prisoner's possession coincided in every respect with that which had been intrusted to Murphy, and we could only surmise that in a hasty moving job, prompted by fear of a police-raid, "Tom" had got the two bags pretty badly mixed, with disastrous consequences to himself. It seemed reasonable to conclude that in the haste and apprehension the prisoner had not only mistaken Murphy for the accredited messenger, but had given him the wrong bag, the idea being to get the damaging evidence safely away to another place by one agent whilst the police were led off on a false trail, after a bag of common or garden bricks by another. Happily, or unhappily, according to the way you are viewing it, the best laid and most innocently artful schemes of mice and men, etc., and so it came to pass that one man got three years' hard labour, and Murphy got a brief experience of the crooked side of London life that will afford him all that he needs in that way for the rest of his existence.

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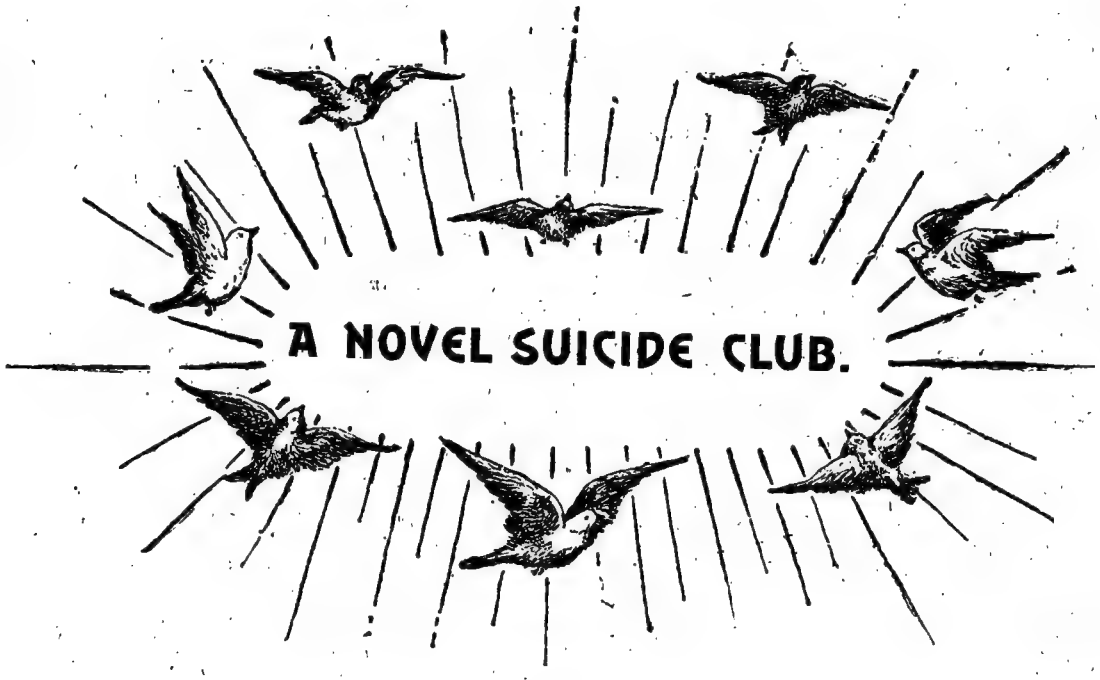

A NOVEL SUICIDE CLUB.

THE following extraordinary advertisement appeared in a London paper one day last summer. It was in an obscure corner, and hardly likely to attract widespread notice, yet its weird invitation to suicide did not escape the eagle eye of my chief at Scotland Yard, at which famous establishment I was then employed :—

WHO WILL DIE WITH ME TO-NIGHT?

I am tired of a solitary life and can bear it no longer. I have neither family nor friends, and I seek others similarly situated who will join me in a plan to end our lives together in comfort. Meet me in the South Kensington Museum at six o'clock, and wear a badge of crape upon your arms. I will wear a similar badge.

X. Y. Z.

I was ordered to investigate, and, if possible, to prevent the formation of such a Suicide Club as seemed to be projected, the methods of which were to be so sweeping and so sudden.

Although armed with a warrant for the arrest of "John Doe, others implicated, etc.," I was especially warned not to make any arrests until I was fully satisfied as to which of those who wore the badge of death, if more than one should appear, was the author of the advertisement and the founder of the new Suicide Club. I was further instructed not to act until I was sure that the crucial time had arrived, and that the strange body of cranks were about to execute their compact to die together.

It was with mingled feelings of amusement and awe that I examined my revolver before starting out on my strange adventure. I was totally unaware of the number of desperate mortals I might be called upon to encounter; but when I reflected upon the folly of attempting to make them desist from their deadly purpose at the point of my pistol, the absurdity of the situation made me smile. There was a suggestion of ghastly humour in the idea of covering a man with a revolver and bidding him, in the name of the law, desist from committing the crime of self-slaughter.

South Kensington Museum is by no means a well-defined trysting place, and as I wandered through its many spacious galleries I feared lest I should fail altogether to encounter the bloodthirsty X.Y.Z., who had not only determined that he himself should die that night, but who sought to obtain travelling companions to that bourne whence no traveller returns.

I felt much oppressed with the weight of responsibility placed upon me. I was to save the life of one, perhaps of more than one fellow-creature; to rescue more than one soul from eternal damnation; and incidentally to arrest possibly a crowd of cranks who cared so little for human life that they were prepared to take even their own at practically a moment's notice. I endured an almost unbearable tension of fear and apprehension lest by some sudden impulse or by some pre-arranged signal one or more of my fellow creatures should hurl themselves into eternity before my eyes, through my delaying action, the fraction of a moment too long.

I had strolled into the Mummy Room, fancifully imagining that it might be an appropriate place for such

a meeting as I had come to witness, and I was leaning against a case containing the shrivelled remains of what was once an Egyptian king, with all the hopes, passions and ambitions of a powerful and lusty ruler, when a bright-eyed, handsome, athletic young fellow sauntered past. I scarcely heeded the eager glance with which he scanned me, for at the moment I did not in the least associate that muscular and healthy specimen of humanity with the presumedly morbid creature who had signed himself "X.Y.Z."

My attention, indeed, was wholly absorbed by a young and extremely pretty girl, who at the same moment was approaching from the other end of the gallery. She bore an unmistakable business air, which, however, did not conceal certain restless symptoms of timidity.

As the handsome young couple passed each other, they started violently, and exchanged an obvious glance of recognition, though they neither spoke nor stopped. It was that which caused me to watch them more closely.

The man wore a somewhat threadbare, though well-fitting, suit of clothes, and a feeling of horror mingled with a sense of professional satisfaction as I saw upon his left sleeve a broad band of black crape. The girl was quietly and tastefully clad in a gown of some dark material, and as she passed me I saw upon the right sleeve of that fair bud of womanhood a similar band of black.

The young girl had evidently noticed the badge of death upon the man's arm, for after walking a few steps beyond me in a hesitating manner, she stopped, and, with her pretty face crimson with blushes, she turned and looked back at him. He also had turned, and stood with his hand at his chin in an attitude of indecision. In this position each looked long and curiously at the other, whom they reciprocally supposed had given them invitation to join in a double suicide.

Pity mingled with admiration seemed to beam from the eyes of the man as he looked at the splendid young creature to whom life, apparently, had so soon become unbearable. Presently, raising his hat with great courtesy, he approached the damsel, who stood expectantly with downcast eyes in evident embarrassment within a few yards of me.

"I am surprised to see you here, Miss Fligh," he began, with some embarrassment.

"I don't see why, Jack," she replied, with a little lingering emphasis on the name.

He flushed with pleasure, and said eagerly, taking her hand:

"Then it's all forgiven, Nelly?"

"Of course, you foolish boy," she answered. "Why were you so stupid?"

He was about to clear up this point, doubtless, when suddenly his face fell, and he said gloomily, touching the band of crape on her arm, "This means business, I suppose?"

Her expression instantly reflected his, and she said, sadly:

"You, too. I had hoped to be alone in this."

He laughed bitterly, and, turning with one accord, this sane and healthy pair, who, according to the terms of the advertisement, were soon to die together, walked slowly down the gallery side by side.

It was clear that neither of them was X.Y.Z. That they were previously acquainted was equally clear. The unmistakable glance of recognition which they had exchanged when they first met had prepared me for the intimate character of the conversation which I had overheard, and which gave an ample clue to the situation. It was evident enough to me. Two lovers, separated by some inexorable reason, probably money or the lack of it, had independently resolved upon making a life which could not be happy as brief as possible. All this I thought out as I strolled down the gallery after them.

As I came nearer to them their talk was again audible to me. Not another word of the unpleasant object of their meeting was spoken by either, however. By a sort of tacit understanding each appeared to avoid the subject of the advertisement, and their conversation consisted exclusively of the usual allusions to the weather. Once when the man thoughtlessly remarked that it would probably be warmer on the morrow, the girl seemed to shrink from him and shiver slightly. And then the pair who had been brought together under such extraordinary circumstances uttered a laugh that had more of pain than pleasure in it, and, lapsing into silence, strolled out into the gallery.

As they approached the restaurant at the entrance of the Museum, the young man said to his beautiful companion, who was soon to be his partner in death:

"Shall we not take a little refreshment—first?"

The word "first" seemed to stick in his throat.

With a smile of reviving happiness the little maid cried, as it seemed to me, joyfully:

"Oh, yes! I would much rather take a little refreshment"—and she, too, had to gulp down something as she added the word, "first."

They took a little table just inside the entrance, and I secured a seat sufficiently near to overhear some of their conversation. They ordered brandy and sodas. So did I. They evidently felt that they needed bracing for the work before them. So did I. Presently they ordered more stimulants, and I began to wonder if the curse of drink was the cause of their being tired of life.

It would have been a merry feast if the skeleton of that horrible advertisement had not sat in the vacant chair and chilled that bright young couple to their very marrow. I flattered myself that I was a close student of character, and though I caught but few of their whispered words, I did not fail to read the feelings of that pair rightly.

In spite of the skeleton, it was quite clear that the young man was very much in love with the strangely pretty creature who was to woo death with him, while the dainty little damsel was entirely unable to disguise the fact that this man who was seeking to die in her company was dearer to her than life. As I watched their ardent glances, and noted their complete absorption in one another, a hope sprang up in me. They had had a little quarrel, I remembered, since there had been a talk of forgiveness. Might not their present ghastly purpose have been the result of this misunderstanding, and might not this misunderstanding be removed in time—before the arrival of the fateful X.Y.Z.?

Inwardly I rejoiced that my mission promised to have such a pleasant termination; but my satisfaction and self-congratulation was premature and misplaced.

At the moment when I felt that their eyes were speaking the preliminaries to an appeal to live and love, as their lips were tremulously framing the words, "Live for me, and I will live for you," a tall, gaunt stranger stopped suddenly just outside the restaurant, and gazed

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long and earnestly at the badges of crape upon the arms of each of the young people. I immediately noticed that he, too, wore the fatal badge of the new Suicide Club, and recognised him at once as the arch-conspirator, X.Y.Z.

If any doubt existed, it would have been at once dispelled by the man crying out in a loud voice :

"Are you the young folks who answered my advertisement? I'm X.Y.Z. Glad to meet you. I've been looking all over the place, but little expected to find my friends of the black band in the restaurant. Never mind. A nip of brandy will put you in good shape for what is to come. Everything is ready and waiting. My carriage is outside. Let's jump in and get along."

All this before the startled pair could speak a word.

This was surely the recklessness of insanity. No one but a madman would have spoken of such a hideous project as he had in hand, in the hearing of people so loudly and so freely. I realised that I had yet a difficult and possibly dangerous task in hand.

Still, I was almost sure that I could count upon the co-operation of the young man who had found a new motive for life in his love for the romantic girl, the current of whose morbid folly he had stemmed.

What was my dismay, then, to see the young people instantly change, and show the greatest eagerness to fulfil to the limit of their appointment with X.Y.Z. It seemed as if the stern old man had suddenly obtained hypnotic influence over that athletic young fellow and that fair frail girl. Before his arrival they had seemed all gentleness and tenderness. Now each seemed as if on stern business bent. They announced their readiness to accompany X.Y.Z. to his home, and at least listen to the details of his scheme.

I knew that the proper moment to make my arrests had not yet arrived ; but above all I wanted to see the home of the founder of the Suicide Club, and to learn the means by which he proposed that these two young people should die with him. It was therefore necessary for me to accompany them in the carriage. I had provided for such an emergency as this, and unobserved I slipped a band of crape around my arm. Then I announced myself as anxious to be of the party.

The young people started suspiciously, but X.Y.Z. greeted me cordially. He laughed loud and boisterously, shouting : "Bravo! The more the merrier!"

At this the young girl shuddered slightly, and seemed about to falter. For a moment her courage appeared about to leave her, and she clung to the arm of the younger man for support. Her pretty cheek flushed, and then became very pale, but she bit her lip and rallied with a determined effort. We passed out of the Museum.

That the founder of the new Suicide Club was no mean personage was proved by the splendour of the brougham and liveried coachman which awaited us outside. We were driven rapidly to a pretentious house in one of the best streets in South Kensington.

On that strange journey not one word was spoken except by the voluble old man, who laughed and chuckled fiendishly. And time after time congratulated himself upon having gathered together ,as he expressed it, "such a nice little family party."

Arrived within the luxuriously furnished room on the ground floor of X.Y.Z.'s house, I was astonished to see that a banquet had been prepared, and we were cordially invited to sit down and partake.

Not one word of our supposed approaching death was spoken by our host, who seemed to be in the best of spirits ; but the three of us naturally thought of nothing else, and the dinner was naturally dull. For my own part, I sent everything away from me untasted, partly from the fear that the old fiend's scheme might be to poison us unawares, and partly because I had no inclination to eat with such a distasteful and probably so dangerous a task before me.

It was a relief when the table was cleared and I still saw no symptoms of convulsions or collapse in my companions. Then it was that the old man arose and deliberately said :

"Now I will make a proposition by which I and my friends may mutually end our lives together in comfort, according to the promise contained in my advertisement."

I fumbled in my pockets, and held a pair of handcuffs ready to snap them on the wrists of the maniac.

"I regret that I am only able to extend this offer to two of you," continued X.Y.Z. ; "for you, sir,"—he was addressing me—"have not fully complied with the terms. You have sat at my table, but you have not eaten with me."

A wave of happiness and thankfulness surged through me at that moment. I felt that my caution had saved my life. But the others! They had eaten, and I felt that there was no time to be lost. Arrests must be made, and physicians must be summoned. Stomach pumps might yet save the lives of those two sturdy young people.

"My scheme is simply this," began the old man, and I decided to wait at least long enough to hear the vile story from the madman's lips.

"You will make a pretty a pair as ever were wed," continued the old fellow ; "and I want you to keep house for me. You shall have the deeds and my fortune when I die."

I was mystified. I gasped for breath.

"All I ask," said X.Y.Z., taking the young people kindly by the hand, "is that you let a lonely old fellow without a friend in the world since he put the badge of a widower on his sleeve have a lodging in the house. Above all, let him never dine alone again as long as he lives."

There was a moment's silence. Then simultaneously three newspaper clippings were produced, and three voices asked in consternation—

"Are you not the man who advertised for someone to die with him?"

"To DIE with me!" shouted X.Y.Z. in accents of horror, at the same time snatching the advertisement from my hand.

"Hang it!" he ejaculated. "The confounded printers have dropped the letter 'N' from its place. I wrote, WHO WILL DINE WITH ME?"

* * * * *

Two smart City editors of up-to-date newspapers the next day failed to print the sensational story of a new Suicide Club, which they had scheduled. For Jack Brevier and Miss Nelly Fligh, each clever reporters, reported it to be a "fake." Shortly afterwards, those enterprising reporters sent in their resignations and X.Y.Z. welcomed into his household an adopted son and daughter.

As for me—I left Scotland Yard, and took to—well that is immaterial, anyway.

You will mention "Short Stories" to your friends, won't you?

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"D'YE 'ear?"

"Yes, I 'ears yer."

"Well, do as I tells yer, then! Wot am I 'ere for?—wot are you 'ere for?—eh! you grey-headed old tar-brush, you!"

"Look a' ere, Joe Bracket! You may be skipper of this y'ere rotten old sailin' box, but you ain't Admiral of the Fleet—yet! So don't you go for to sling yer dirty insinivations at my grey 'airs. I've a' buried six o' your sort; so don't you forgit it, as I ain't a 'green,' 'and as 'll stand your cusses with impunerty."

"Captain" Bracket evidently concluded that he had had the worst of the argument; and, well knowing old Jim's peculiarities, and fo'castle reputation as a "ship's lawyer," prudently dived below, in retreat to his own den.

Old Jim did not seem to care much either way. He just turned his "quid," followed with one eye the disappearing form of his superior, and resumed his work (a splicing job) as composedly as if nothing had occurred to interrupt it.

It was a moot point with three for'ard hands as to who it was that really "ran" the craft—Old Jim (otherwise "Spouty,") or "Captain" Joe. There was a periodical inclination towards the "cook" (such being Jim's rating on board); but an exceptional "bluster," or a more than usually vigorous "tear-round" on the skipper's part at once put the latter in front again, an easy first.

He was, in fact, a "terror," on the whole, to every man on board the *Sarah Ann*, save and except Old Jim.

It was not that he drank to excess, thereby aggravating any natural predisposition to play the tyrant—his worst enemy could not justly accuse him of that. Truth was, he was a born "Jack-in-Office." To be master, absolutely, and without appeal, was his devouring ambition. Certainly, any success he may have had in that direction was due in large measure to an abnormal cultivation of two attributes than which none better serve the purpose of the average would-be despot—obstinacy, and self-esteem.

Then he was a big man, and bore down weaker wills by sheer force of physical superiority.

The mate, a little man, one Abel Dove, was a notable example, and an especial and a frequent victim. Each trip Abel vowed should be the last, and it was only because he and the *Sarah Ann* had been friends, without a break, for over twenty years, that he could not bring himself to give effect to his resolution.

Old Jim and the "mate" were the best of "pals," owing, it may be, more to the existence of a common grievance than to any moral likeness between them, or a similarity of disposition.

The cook was, of course, an "*ex-officio*," a member of the fo'castle set, its spokesman (on occasion), and its adviser at all times; but the mate, occupying a sort of "Mohammed's Coffin" position, between skipper and crew, the butt and scapegoat of the one, and the distrusted natural enemy of the other, was virtually acknowledged by neither.

The *Sarah Ann*, this trip, was in "light ballast," and bound back for Rochester, to which place she belonged.

Everybody on board was having a lazy time of it. The weather was fine, and the sun, during the major part of the day, hot to blazing point.

Now and again, "Captain" Joe would arouse him from a Napoleonic nap (like the great Corsican, he could sleep at will), and scatter the "idlers" in all directions. He had earned his patronymic "Boss," not so much by a righteous insistence upon the strict performance of legitimate duty, but for his aggravating assumption, and "bullying way" in connection with trivial and altogether unnecessary details. "*The* Boss," in the ordinary sense of the designation he was not, but "Boss," a riverine despot, an autocratic irritant, whose every act and word was as a "storm signal" for his unfortunate subordinates.

His passage-at-arms with Old Jim, already chronicled, had reference to a somewhat sore subject, perennial almost in its habit of continually "cropping up" as between the two.

It seemed that "Boss" had at some time or other in the remote past wooed and won a certain Kentish beauty, dwelling in the neighbourhood of Rainham, on the Medway.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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The wedding-day was fixed, the guests invited, and a gorgeous spread supplied by a Rochester confectioner.

At the last moment, however, almost, it may be said, at the Altar's foot, the "bridegroom designate" elected to repudiate his obligations—incontinently changed his mind.

When bride and guests assembled in eager anticipation of an especially "happy day," gastronomically and otherwise, "Captain" Joe was well on his way, with a fair wind and a flowing sheet, towards London.

It cannot be contended that the lady's disappointment was either keen or lasting, as, before three months had elapsed, she had consoled herself with the runaway's "best man."

This convenient arrangement ought, in the nature of things, to have ended the matter, and would have done, no doubt, had there not been something more behind.

The sting of the whole affair—the sting left, that is,—was the unsettled-for marriage feast.

In the not-as-yet faded glow of love and expectant happiness, it had been ordered by "Captain" Joe himself, and when the day of settlement arrived, the friends of his sometime intended, deeming the recreant swain alone responsible, declined paying on any consideration.

Now it so happened that Old Jim, then Young Jim, was at that time a working hand in his elder brother's "cook and confectionery" business in High Street Rochester—the particular establishment favoured by "Captain" Joe.

A single man himself in those days, and therefore without any of life's ordinary cares and anxieties, Old Jim had adopted this "bad debt" as a peculiar personal grievance.

His brother had long ceased to trouble about it, seeing the utter hopelessness of ever getting his money; but Old Jim had his own opinion, and backed it to the full extent of his ability. Ever with the one purpose in view the bringing "Boss" to book—he first schemed, and successfully, to get employed on board the *Sarah Ann;* and then, in season and out of season, to maintain a patiently persistent "nudging," as it were, of the "defaulting" skipper's memory.

No one opportunity did he lose to "say a few words;" and when his victim, goaded almost to madness, commanded the doing of something "not in the order book." Jim only smilingly shrugged his shoulders and "piled up" for next time.

In this, his latest attempt to "dun" the skipper, he had been aided materially by some news which had reached him while the boat was lying for a few hours off Erith.

"Captain" Joe's old flame had, it appeared, recently lost her husband, a prosperous Rochester tradesman, and the widow, though past middle life, was not disinclined to the idea of taking another mate. Being fairly well-to-do, this would be no very difficult matter—Jim's informant more than half hinting that "Boss" could have the "situation" for the asking.

This latter detail Jim had, for obvious reasons, kept to himself; but the fact of the "Captain's" erewhile rival's decease had been used by him in a masterly manner as an illustrious means to the one great end.

That it affected Mr. Bracket not a little we have seen, and when he sat down to dinner with the mate, the latter saw unmistakably that something more than ordinarily important or unpleasant was on the board.

Still, nothing occurred of any moment or worth mentioning, beyond the usual "snap" and "snarl", which was too common and every-day an experience to be taken serious notice of.

Rochester reached, "Captain" Joe "tidied" himself with exceptional care, and, leaving strict injunctions with his deputy that no one was to go ashore until he returned, went his way up from the river into the town.

Two hours afterwards he came aboard again, and sent immediately for the "cook."

Old Jim slouched aft, and deliberately made his way down through the "hatch" to where the skipper awaited him.

"I want," he said, rattling a handful of coins in his trousers pocket, "I want to pay that bill."

"Well," said Old Jim, a trifle puzzled, but not showing it, "pay it! You've bin long enough time thinkin' about it! It's time yer did."

"But who've I got to pay it to?" asked the skipper, impatiently a bit, but still keeping his temper wonderfully for him.

"D'ye want ter know?" queried Old Jim, with a curious little laugh.

"If I didn't I shouldn't ask yer!" retorted the other.

"Oh, yer wouldn't, wouldn't yer? I ain't so sure about that; but since yer don't know, and want ter know, why, I'll tell yer."

"Out with it, then. Who is it I've got to pay the money to?"

"ME!"

"You! You miserable old scallywag! You! What have you got to do with it?"

"Jist this. Brother's dead; bin dead for years. I'm 'is 'exekiter,' an' sole legatee. That's wot I've got ter do with it!"

"Well, I ain't disposed to argue the point with you. Here's the money, and your discharge. Now you can clear out as soon as you like. Go ashore and stay there."

"I will—it'll just suit me. I wants a master, not a 'Boss.' But look a 'ere, 'Captain' Joe," and Old Jim held out his right hand, and turned over slowly the money in it with his left, "if I may be so bold as to ask, Wot's yer little game? Why's yer so sudden pertikler in payin' up?"

"If you don't pack up and get ashore, I'll 'ave you put over the side!"

"No you won't. Not, at least, without paying me my wages."

"Captain" Joe saw that he had made a mistake, and hastened to rectify it.

In half an hour Old Jim, bundle in hand, his wages in one pocket, his "breakfast" money in the other, left the *Sarah Ann* without much regret.

In the bar of the "Rodney Arms" he ran against the mate, Abel Dove. To him Old Jim repeated his query anent the probable motives of "Captain" Joe; but the mate was in all respects as ignorant as himself.

When, however, in the course of a week or so, Old Jim heard of his late skipper's union with the widow Dyson, the riddle was solved, and—he thought things.

He made just one remark on the subject, which, inasmuch as it explains much which otherwise would remain an inexplicable mystery, is worthy of record.

"'Boss' he may be on the deck of the *Sairy Ann:* but if 'e'll be 'boss' on 'er 'earthrug, then I'm a thunderin' old idiot."

Which he certainly was not.

RALPH ENDERBY.

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

CHAPTER XXII.

"A Very Pretty Clue."

"I am fortunate in finding you alone, Miss Carew; I particularly desired the privilege of a brief private conversation with you."

Otto Hare paused near the large "chesterfield," from which Esther had just risen. He removed his driving-gloves to extend a small, brown palm.

Esther Carew permitted him to clasp her fingers; the Golden Dwarf felt that they were of an almost deathly coldness.

"The last time I had the honour to touch your hand, Miss Carew," observed Otto Hare, "you fainted; owing, no doubt, to the closeness of the afternoon. May I express my pain at your indisposition and a hope that it was merely transient."

"Quite, thank you, Mr. Hare," murmured Esther.

Her voice trembled—she had reason to dread an interview with the diminutive personage who now stood before her. This particular colloquy she had especial cause to fear; Dr. Kraft's warning was precise; upon her conduct for the next few moments hung the fate of the man she loved best in the world.

The Golden Dwarf flung down his hat and gloves and leaned on the end of the couch; fascinated yet terrified, Esther resumed her seat. The dark eyes of Otto Hare studied her—a sombre passion glowed in their unfathomable depths.

"Miss Carew," he said, "tell me, would you rather have me for a friend or an enemy?"

The demand fell on Esther's ears like a veiled threat.

"I—I don't wish to have any enemies," she stammered.

Her persecutor frowned.

"Some people must be either one or the other," he objected. "I am a person of that sort, Miss Carew. If I were to become your foe, for instance, I should hate those you cherished and cherish those you hated. Man, woman, child, or beast, I should rejoice in destroying all that was dear to you, in aiding all that was hostile to you. Were I in love and had a rival—a favoured rival, Miss Carew—I would ruin him; by fair means or foul, I would ruin him."

Esther struggled for breath, a grasp of iron seemed laid upon her heart—Kraft's caution came back to her: "Mr. Hare has secretly obtained proof that on the night of Sir Christopher's death his nephew was in Wyresdale." Whether or not she was intended to comprehend the full meaning of the Golden Dwarf's deliberate phrases, they were an unmistakable menace.

"You—you could not be so dishonourable, Mr. Hare," she faltered, her bosom heaving.

Otto Hare sneered. "Honour and dishonour are but words, Miss Carew," was his answer; "when I set my mind on a thing, every expedient is good which brings me to my goal. If you knew me better you would admit that I do not boast in saying so. However, I will not pursue the subject, since it displeases you."

He relinquished his lounging attitude and stepped up to sit by her. A shudder ran over Esther, yet she did not dare to shrink from him. "Harden yourself against Mr. Hare's suit," the wily German had told her, "and I would not give a bad half-crown for Mr. Dering's life."

"You are aware," proceeded Otto Hare, "of my plan to give a garden party in Wyresdale Park and of your mother's kind promise to act as hostess?"

Esther Carew assented; the Golden Dwarf, by a skilful change of position, diminished the space between them.

"Miss Carew," said Otto Hare, "you will naturally be present at that event, and your presence, under the circumstances, will set the gossips chattering. You are young and beautiful, I am rich and a bachelor—you are the only woman in Wyresdale to whom I have paid, during fifteen years, the least regard."

He looked into her pallid face with cool self-possession.

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Esther gazed at him, her nerves strained, her brain whirling. Would he ask her to marry him—him whom she had met a bare fortnight earlier, yet had never seen except to fear and to loathe? She could not, she could not say "yes." But if she answered "no" what might not happen to Felix?

"Such gossip," continued the Golden Dwarf, "flattering though it would be to me, might offend you, Miss Carew. I have even been assured that without Mr. Felix Dering, whose mourning for Sir Christopher must keep him away, my party would be but dull to Miss Esther Carew."

Esther blushed, as much with terror as embarrassment. The keen pupils of Otto Hare seemed to devour her expression.

"Not that I credit these foolish rumours," said the Golden Dwarf; "yet I confess, Miss Carew, had I believed this, I should have been compelled to protect you from this black-sheep of the Derings. I have a sly sympathy for the criminal, and while I could, if I chose, put Mr. D.'s neck in danger of the noose, it is no business of mine to do the work of the police. But if he were to cross my—or shall I say our paths, Miss Carew, it would be different. I should have to hit hard."

The listener moaned. Dr. Kraft had not, then, deceived her. Vaguely, diabolically, Otto Hare was threatening Felix Dering. The Golden Dwarf smiled—a cruel, satisfied smile.

"Of course," added Otto Hare, "I realise the ridiculous nature of the report that you are attracted by Mr. Dering, and he is safe from me so long as he does not insult you with his attentions. Were he to presume that far, I will own, Miss Carew, I should be malicious enough to do him a very ill turn, a very ill turn."

The Golden Dwarf bent towards the drooping form of Esther.

"I have pointed out to you," he said, "the construction which will be placed on your presence at my party. You might be tempted to develop a headache, or some nominal indisposition as an excuse for your absence. I should resent that bitterly, Miss Carew, and I want you to promise you will not fail me."

He put out a tiny palm and laid it on hers. It stung her like the contact of some venomous claw. But she murmured to herself the name of Felix; for his sake she would endure, she would warn him to fly, she would gain time for him to make his escape. Glancing with piteous eyes at Otto Hare, she replied weakly, "I—I will certainly be there, Mr. Hare, since you wish it."

A kiss, lightly imprinted upon Esther's hand, was the Golden Dwarf's acknowledgment of the undertaking she had entered into. Unimportant as it seemed, it served to show that Esther had understood his threat against Felix Dering, and that, moreover, to protect her lover, she was prepared to tolerate at least the rumour of an engagement

A couple of figures—a thin and a stout—were stealing towards him.

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between herself and Otto Hare. Thus, the unscrupulous device of Dr. Kraft had been crowned by a measure of success.

The Golden Dwarf was no mean diplomatist.

Content with his achievement, he bade his quivering victim farewell and bowed himself out, leaving Esther to weep and chafe unavailingly.

Mounting into his "spider" phaeton, Otto Hare took the reins from the groom and roused the cobs; the animals dashed off at their usual swift trot. They reached the cross-roads and turned down, under their master's control, the narrow lane which led to the lodge-gates of Dering House.

Their way took them past the dilapidated cottage of Nicholas Foley. The Golden Dwarf, who glanced this side and that as the roans dashed along, noticed the one-armed sailor. Nicholas, grasping a tall lime-wash brush, was at work on the weather-beaten walls of his residence.

Otto Hare drew rein in so sudden a fashion as to drag the most spirited of the cobs upon its haunches.

Foley heard the scuffle of hoofs and looked round. The Golden Dwarf motioned with his whip, and Nicholas, reluctantly enough, deposited the brush in an angle of the door and came to the kerb.

The sailor's tanned countenance was a trifle anxious, but he stared up boldly at the remarkable being who had summoned him.

"I've seen you before, my man, haven't I," said Otto Hare, his delicate features distorted to a grim smile.

Nicholas Foley stepped clear of the phaeton wheels, the cobs were swinging fretfully back and forward, impatient of the stoppage.

"I'm none so positive of that, sir," he observed. "Where might you fancy you'd sighted me?"

The Golden Dwarf knitted his brows. "No evasions," was his answer; "you know where I saw you—in Wyresdale Park, the other day. Come, I forgive you taking care of yourself; you shall hear no more of the accident to—to my dog." He got out a sovereign-purse, slipped a coin from it, and tossed the piece of money to the sailor. "What were you there for," he demanded; "poaching or curiosity? You shan't regret frankness."

Nicholas grinned. "Well, your honour," he said, "a fine fat rabbit gives a bit of a taste to bread and ale, and I'm but a dismasted hulk. It's hard to live at the best."

Otto Hare studied the speaker a second. "I don't grudge an old seaman a rabbit or two," rejoined the Golden Dwarf; "but you must be careful of the dogs. And you'd better tell the keeper you have permission to set a few snares. But no powder and shot, mind. What's your name?"

Nicholas pulled his forelock, astonished. "Foley," he said; "Nicholas Foley, and thank your honour."

Otto Hare had not waited for the expression of his *protégé's* gratitude; the phaeton was already a score of yards down the road.

The sailor scratched his cranium. "Nick, my lad," he muttered; "here's where you'll heave the lead, if you're wise. Is the little beggar bony-fidey, or is he not? And why the dickens should he forgive me knifing his bow-wow; it isn't natural."

He went up the narrow garden-walk, regained his brush, and proceeded with the whitening of the cottage.

"Blowed," was his reflection, "if I don't toddle off to-night and take afresh the bearings of that run place in the Park. With a pal and a length of good rope I'd have had it overhauled from truck to keelson; I've neither line nor messmate, worse luck."

His task occupied him till dusk. When he had eaten his evening meal and smoked a pipe, the moon was up and the lanes of Wyresdale cool and dark in the scented gloom.

Locking his door, Nicholas set out in the direction of the brick wall that skirted the Golden Dwarf's demesnes. The low-growing boughs on the main-road once more gave him access to the park and he stole through the plantation to the green slope and the round-topped tower.

On the edge of the plantation he paused. A couple of figures—a thin and a stout—were stealing towards him. An indistinct load was borne by the latter, an implement of some sort by the former. Foley climbed a tree with singular skill and stretched himself upon its biggest branch.

At a short distance the shadowy shapes had halted. By the moonbeams the sailor was able to perceive that one was apparently engaged in the act of digging. Anxious to observe them at less disadvantage, Nicholas crawled further along his branch. The procedure was disastrous, the strained fibres bent and swung.

The noise of the rent wood arrested the dim figures, they moved towards the origin of the mimic explosion. From several quarters there arose also the sudden clamour of the ferocious mastiffs which ran loose in the park. Foley dropped to the ground, doubled on his tracks, and fled.

As he surmounted the wall and slid to the kerb a heavy hand descended upon his shoulder. It was that of Inspector Brasher.

Nicholas threw off the grasp.

"Belay there," he said, "I've not been trespassing nor yet poaching. I've merely been to set a few snares for rabbits—Mr. Hare himself gave me permission. My name is Foley, retired seaman, and brother-in-law to Mr. Forester, chemist, of the High Street. This course is the nearest, so I steer it, though I might go round by the avenue."

Michael Brasher stroked his beard. "Brother-in-law to Mr. Forester," he repeated. "How long have you been in Wyresdale?"

"Less than a fortnight and more than a week," said Nicholas, dodging alertly by the Inspector. "I've lost a spar, as you see, and come back to my old wharf. Ta-ta! You ask Mr. Hare about me; he'll tell you I'm right about the snares. Bong-swore!" And the sailor sprang off into the darkness and vanished so abruptly that Mr. Brasher could not have guessed which way to follow him.

The Inspector, however, was not thinking of pursuit.

"Less than a fortnight and more than a week," repeated Michael Brasher, "and it is but eleven days since Sir Christopher Dering was found dead in the ditch at the cross roads."

Mr. Brasher whistled softly. "By Jupiter!" burst forth the Inspector. "And he said he was Forester's brother-in-law. Michael, you have picked up a very pretty clue."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mrs. Schwartz Takes a Cab.

"Whew, Keturah, but you do beat all for sizing up the situation. Not but what I think you're wrong this time, though it's as well to take an account of the possibility that you're right."

Keturah Schwartz sniffed. "I tell you," she retorted; "Joseph Kraft kept his eye on the lad the whole while he was here, and when he went he stopped to look at the brat as though he were making an inventory of it."

Neal Garland lighted a cigarette. "You are too imaginary, Keturah," he observed; "however, we'll be on the safe side. Brian Dering shan't stop in Pimlico another hour. Yet, as I brought him into London and I may—I say I may—have been tracked, you had better do the next move with him."

"Don't expect me to mix myself up with your dirty work," objected the landlady, folding her plump arms; "I did more than was wise when I sheltered the kid."

Her lodger bit his lip. "Come, Keturah," he growled;

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"it's too late in the day for you to shirk trifles. Besides, if you've decided to spoil my last chance of picking up a bit I shall cut and run to France. I'm sick of this low British starvation. In Paris I can have a merry life, whether or not it proves to be a short one."

Mrs. Schwartz sighed. "I'm a bit of a fool over you, Neal," she confessed, "and you know how to work on my feelings. But there, I'm a woman, and women have a weakness for your sort of rogue. What do you want me to do?"

Neal slipped an arm about the speaker's fat waist. "In the first place, my dear soul," was his answer, "we must give the boy a disguise that'll last long enough to let us cover up his trail. And in the second place we must put him with some thoroughly discreet person, who, for a consideration, will relieve us of him altogether. I will provide the disguise if you will recommend the guardian."

Keturah Schwartz pondered. "I'll manage my share," she said at length; "but how do you propose to hide the identity of a child like that?"

"You will see," responded Neal, tipping the ash from his cigarette, and going towards the door; "I shall be back in a moment." He waved a hasty adieu and left the room.

Mrs. Schwartz followed her lodger out to the stairs which ascended in a series of steep flights from the basement of the house. Brian still sat where she had deposited him, on a step carpeted with worn Brussels. Keturah took the young baronet by the hand and led him into the parlour.

"Let me be sure you understand the lesson I taught you," she bade the child; "tell me your name."

Brian coloured and hesitated. Mrs. Schwartz gained the hearth-rug, stooped, gasping, secured the poker, and stalked across to her charge.

"Tell me your name," she said again; "and speak up, you limb."

Brian Dering faltered over the single syllable required. "Jack," he murmured; "but please mother will cry if I tell lies."

Mrs. Schwartz feinted at him with the steel bar. "And I," said the landlady "will make you cry if you don't. You ever dare to admit you're called anything but Jack and I will heat this poker till it is red-hot and bore ten thousand little holes in you with it. No matter where you are I will hear you and fly to you on a broomstick with my poker."

Keturah Schwartz resumed her chair, poured herself out some gin from the flask at her elbow and sipped it in a succession of laps resembling those of a cat.

Brian sank down on the floor and began to weep, terrified by the landlady's threat. The tortoise-shell kitten, recognising a playmate, walked to him and purred invitingly.

The little baronet gathered it up, sobbing, yet soothed by the contact of the soft and furry creature.

Mrs. Schwartz fanned herself with her newspaper, yawned and dozed. The arrival of Neal Garland awakened her.

Her lodger carried a palm-leaf fan and a paper parcel, which he tore open to reveal a large squat bottle.

"Bring me some warm water," he ordered, "in a wide basin; also some soap and a towel."

"Gracious!" ejaculated the landlady, "the imp's too clean as it is, to pass for a gutter brat."

Neal motioned impatiently.

"Don't argue, Keturah," was his retort, "but do as I wish."

Mrs. Schwartz descended, and, after a short absence, appeared laden with materials for the toilet.

"Fetch the kid to the table," desired her lodger, "he seems to fear you sufficiently to be quiet while you wash his head. Rinse and dry it thoroughly."

Keturah Schwartz obeyed.

Too horrified by her ingenious threats to resist, Brian endured her powerful operations.

The first stage completed, Neal displaced her, and, with a small brush, worked into Brian's fair curls some strongly-smelling fluid.

This done, he deputed Mrs. Schwartz to fan them dry again, a long and tedious process.

When they had been freed from moisture, the silken tresses of the tiny baronet showed no less picturesque than usual, but their yellow gloss had changed to a ruddy chestnut. So had her fair brows and lashes.

Once more Neal picked up his brush, plied it, and then had recourse to Mrs. Schwartz and her fan. The perspiration rolled down the stout woman's glowing face as she fluttered the crisp palm-leaf.

"I never knew before, Neal, my man," she owned, "that there was so much labour in a dyeing job. Another coat, Neal, and his hair will favour mine wonderfully. Does it wear off?"

"Of course," snarled Neal, "it's not the real article, like your ginger mop. Steady with the fan, I'll give him a last touch with the brush. Hang those blue eyes of his, if it hadn't been for them I'd have made his wig brown, and given his skin a dash of walnut-juice, but, thanks to his azure orbs, I'll have to leave his complexion as it is.

The speaker's lean fingers travelled quickly over Brian Dering's head, using the brush deftly to equalise the colour. No trace of the child's fair curls remained, and the more recent warm tint had deepened to a dark chestnut. Neal himself fanned his concluded handiwork dry.

"Now," he said, "I deliver the boy to you, and recollect it is penal for both of us if the child blabs in dangerous ears."

Keturah Schwartz lifted Brian Dering into her arms. So much manipulation had rendered him sleepy, he drooped upon her shoulder.

"I'll guarantee that," she promised; "since I am to be responsible for the job, I'll see it's done properly."

Her lodger lit a fresh cigarette and reached his hat.

"Ta ta, Keturah," he remarked; "you're a trump, and I'll not forget it."

With this vague pledge, Neal Garland strode off downstairs, the softness of his footfalls suggesting that his boot-soles were in need of repair.

Mrs. Schwartz bore the unconscious Brian to another chamber, and laid him on a bed, while she pinned a rusty black bonnet above her coiffure and donned a soiled cloth dolman. Equipped for her journey, she took up the child, went to the hall below, and requested her maid to procure a hansom.

The slatternly damsel blew a huge whistle, and a cab trotted to the kerb. Mrs. Schwartz, weighted with the slumbering child, entered it.

"Houndsditch," she instructed the driver, and the vehicle clattered away.

But Keturah Schwartz did not notice the amazed countenance of her servant, who, from the steps of the dismal boarding-house, watched the departure of the hansom.

"My goodness!" cried the girl, "what have they done to his poor dear hair?"

If Mrs. Schwartz could have heard the query she might not have driven eastward with such content. As it could not gain her attention, she rolled on unwittingly, past Westminster, up the Strand, through the City, and towards that distant haunt of vice and crime, Whitechapel.

At the bottom of the oddly titled but famous street to which she had directed the cabman, Mrs. Schwartz dismissed the vehicle and struck into the Whitechapel Road, the central artery of the huge low-class suburb that boasts the same sobriquet."

Her goal was a mean terrace on the fringe of a district that swarmed with foreign Jews.

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Keturah Schwartz paused and scanned a group of miserable shops, which, illuminated by smoky oil-lamps, threw a slight additional radiance across the gloom left by the few gas-standards on the side-walks. After a brief survey of these establishments, Mrs. Schwartz slipped into one—a squalid sweet and grocery store.

Behind the counter sat an old hag—a hideous being, with chin-tuft, bristling moustache, dirt-engrained cheeks, and eye-lids bleared to rawness by filth.

The new-comer, still folding Brian in her arms, leaned on the grimy board—where was displayed a few boxes of confectionery, a shank of boiled ham, some canned meats and pickle-jars—and began to whisper.

As she muttered, the palsied head of the listener nodded, and nodded, and nodded again. Then Keturah Schwartz pulled up her dress-skirt, opened a linen pocket, got out a purse and produced a handful of coins. The beldame snatched at them, fearful of losing the precious pieces.

The colloquy over, Mrs. Schwartz glided to the shadow at the rear of the place, and relinquished, into the unsteady clasp of the old crone, the form of Brian Dering. A moment later Keturah had darted forth into the night.

Grinning covetously, the hag put away her bribe, reeled with her burden down a cramped passage which gave upon the shop, turned a latch, and entered a fireless kitchen. On the damp hearth a child was crawling, with deep, pitiful coughs, another toddled about the flagged floor, yet another kicked helplessly by the mouldered skirting-board, on a ragged cushion that had once done duty in a trap.

His custodian laid Brian on an evil-smelling pallet which furnished a corner of the apartment. Unheeding the desolate childhood around her, she regained the exit, passed out, and fastened the latch.

Brian Dering was in the merciless clutches of an East-end baby-farmer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I Have No Brother."

"Then you have at least been able to track the child," murmured Felix Dering; "thank Heaven for that. But the cheque, Miss Garland, have you realised how it may be construed? If I had only filled it in to you, the fact would have sufficed to prove the theft. As it is, made out to bearer, it cannot but suggest a plot between myself and the abductor."

He hesitated and glanced suspiciously at Judith—she wielded the reins like a born whip, the ponies moved at a free, quick trot, the neat basket carriage swaying on its springs.

"For an amateur detective," added Felix, "you have worked with singular skill, Miss Garland. The problem you claim to have solved has so far baffled the keenest professional minds. What else have you learned? Who is the scoundrel? We must take immediate action."

"*S-s-s-t!*" said Judith Garland, under her breath; "speak low, you forget the groom behind us. This is not the moment for a full explanation. But abandon all thoughts of desperate remedies. You are at the mercy of a dangerous man; he it was who discovered the blood-stained links of your chain and interpreted their significance, he it was who abducted Brian, he it is who now assures me that the child can never be regained alive."

The listener gasped.

"But his—his motive?" stammered Felix, bewildered by this new development of the mystery.

"I—I dare but conjecture it," whispered Judith, and her voice broke in a clever assumption of dread; "yet I have wondered if he had any grudge against Sir Christopher, if he has been pursuing a terrible scheme of revenge, if—he was the—the one who——"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Felix; "the one who murdered my uncle! Miss Garland, you are the possessor of ghastly secrets. Then those blood-stained links you represented to me as the evidence of my crime came possibly from the actual murderer himself. But why should he give you them?"

"I will come to that in a moment," said Judith Garland. "Mr. Dering," and, under cover of the driving-apron, she laid her hand on her companion's, "I told Lady Dering I had to go to London this week on family business. I spoke the truth; the unhappy wretch of whom I have been speaking is—is my brother."

Felix felt himself the prey of some frightful nightmare.

"Your—your brother!" he repeated. "The brother for whom I advanced you, by means of that cheque, the twenty pounds of salary you could not ask Lady Dering for?"

"The same," assented Judith. "He appeared unexpectedly at Wyresdale, in a piteous state, and implored me to aid him. I asked him why he needed the money, and he would not answer. When I took him your cheque he found, by chance, in my presence, those links of your chain. I recognised them impulsively, and so placed you in his power; for you had denied being at Wyresdale the night of your uncle's death, and he himself had seen you by the Cross that evening. And now, Mr. Dering, I don't know which is guilty, you or my miserable brother."

She stirred the soft palm which had slipped upon his. "But," she said, "since I gathered, the other day, that you had come back for a dear, romantic reason—to be near a certain person who cares for you as much as you can do for her—I have liked to believe you innocent."

Felix shuddered. How could he attempt to convince Judith Garland of the mistake into which she had fallen, it seemed, so naturally? How confess to her it was not her window he had returned to gaze at the night of Sir Christopher's death; but Esther Carew's?

"We—we must consider what can be done," whispered Judith, as she guided the ponies between the double row of firs that yielded access to Dering House; "but remember, Neal—my brother—can ruin you in two ways; he can prove you were in Wyresdale House, though you chivalrously denied the suggestion rather than direct attention to a lady. And also he is able to allege, by producing the cheque, that you paid him to kidnap Brian."

A sense of paralysis seized on Felix. Fatality had dogged him with a perfect completion. He had but to extend a limb to find it bound.

"How—how was Brian taken?" he murmured.

Judith sighed. "I—I was his reluctant accomplice," she said; and added, with a master-stroke of falsehood, "he threatened to betray you if I refused to help him. He—he guessed that I was not indifferent to you—I had borrowed the links to satisfy you of your danger, for then I believed you guilty. He was obliged to force them from me again. In any case he had but to enter the witness-box and swear to your presence in Wyresdale on a certain evening."

Judith halted the ponies at the embayed central door of Dering House. "Good-bye, for the present," she whispered, "I have some purchases to deliver Lady Dering—we can talk more at ease another time."

She threw the reins to the groom and passed, a dark, handsome, yet sinister figure, into the hall.

Felix pursued her across the threshold. "Miss Garland," he began determinedly, "you shall not escape me thus. You have said too much and too little."

Judith paused and glanced over her shoulder—a flush of curious passion warming her features. Supple, erect, with her Spanish cast of countenance, ample tresses and red lips, she was a seductive whole.

"Too little, my poor Felix," she answered, the strange

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His custodian laid Brian on an evil-smelling pallet which furnished a corner of the room.

ardour she felt for him throbbing in her voice and lending a singular resonance to her wilful misapprehension of his meaning," what more can I say than that I love you; is it possible that you can doubt it?"

And evading him, she hurried on into the hall. Stepping out of the late sunshine to the cool shadows of the lofty apartments, Judith Garland lost for an instant all power of vision. When she recovered it she perceived before her a tall and bulky form, clad in a loose frock-coat and carrying a brown straw hat of a Continental shape. His bright spectacles veiled yellow pupils and imparted to them a singular glitter. It was Professor Kraft, and he stood within the entrance to the hall of Dering House.

Judith regarded him questioningly. The German bowed.

"I am Dr. Kraft, Mr. Otto Hare's private medical attendant," he said in his thick, deliberate foreign accent. "you may have heard me mentioned. You, I see, are Miss Garland. Pardon this call without introduction, but I know so few people at Wyresdale. The servants told me you were expected each moment, and I ventured to wait—my errand being a business one. How is your brother?"

The quiet gaze of Judith Garland met the yellow pupils. Dr. Kraft smiled. "You can trust me," he said. "I guess Master Neal is not a desirable kinsman for a young lady earning a moderate competence in a genteel household. But I urgently need some particulars about him, though you need not fear my publishing them in any fashion detrimental to yourself."

Judith contemplated the German scornfully. "I have no brother, Dr. Kraft," she said, "and therefore am unable to be a sister of your evidently disreputable acquaintance."

Joseph Kraft rubbed his great palms together. "In face, hair, complexion, and stature," he declared, "you resemble my 'disreputable acquaintance' as one pea resembles another. Yet it may well be that I am wrong. In which case, Miss Garland, I beg your pardon. Forgive my being ungallant enough to remark, time will show if the apology is deserved."

He bowed again and sallied out to the terrace before Dering House, passing Felix as he did so. Kraft gazed thoughtfully at the stalwart frame of Esther Carew's lover.

"'What more can I say,'" repeated Kraft to himself, "'than that I love you; is it possible that you can doubt it?' So I have not visited Miss Judith Garland in vain, be she Master Neal's sister or not. Felix Dering is coquetting with the brunette as well as the blonde. We have here a distinctly useful weapon against the amorous Felix."

(To be continued.)

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

THE IVORY BELLS.

By James Buckham.

My name is Imogen Diller, and I am twenty-five years old. The reader will, perhaps, understand more readily from this statement the confession I am about to make. Being a woman, I am naturally a believer in dreams. I think I never knew a woman who was entirely free from this mild form of superstition. And being comparatively young—as life is estimated nowadays—I am romantic.

I was twenty-two when my heart first began to hunger for sympathy, for appreciation, for affection. How natural, how inevitable is this period in a girl's life-history. It is a condition as normal as the unfolding of a bud. And equally natural, I think, are the little innocent, instinctive girlish devices for rendering herself beautiful in dress and manner, her love for going into company, there to meet the rank and file of those from whom must be recruited her possible prince. She shines in looks, in thoughts and words, in actions, with the glow of that hardly-acknowledged desire within her breast—the desire for the true, manly love which she feels that she can so opulently repay.

If the world only knew! It laughs at girls who are dying for unattained love. It would weep could it see into their hearts. So terrible is it to feel youth slipping away, and with it that hope for which, by the decree of God, most women live.

It was one day, soon after I had passed my twenty-third birthday, that a terrible thought came to me—the thought that I should be over the hill of youth in a little while, and going down to the other side; that the hope I had silently cherished, which I had never as yet considered impossible, might soon be a lessening one. I cannot tell what a flood of depression overwhelmed me! All that day, and far into the night, my soul cried out to God for the precious gift, without which my life would mean nothing.

Among my dreams that night when at last I slept there was one that visited me twice and seemed to be in a vague way an answer to my passionate prayer. I saw myself standing on a bare hillside, whose slope was black with shadow. In the midst of the gloom I raised my hands and something white came floating down out of the clouds. It looked like a wreath of snowy flowers; but as it drifted slowly down and settled in my outstretched hands I saw that it was a necklace of little white bells. I put the bells about my neck, and instantly a glorious burst of sunlight illumined the hill and I awoke. Twice I say this dream came to me—once in the middle of the night and once just before waking in the morning. As I opened my eyes in the real sunlight the dream seemed so actual and so vivid that I clutched my bosom, thinking to catch the bells before they melted away.

As I considered the vision, I said to myself, "There is a hint in this dream worth heeding. Hitherto I have neglected personal adornment, thinking that love must indeed be blind, if he cannot see beyond the surface glitter of that which is foreign even to the physical person. But it may be that love is not blind, only wandering of sight. Does, perhaps, something crude, glittering, conspicuous, catch his eye, and draw it whither it may discover the better thing that lies behind? I will see!"

Every girl knows perfectly well the kind and amount of her own personal attraction. I knew what people called me—what I was: "Not exactly pretty, but stately, impressive; a matronly girl, of the Dutch Madonna type." Such a type is not generally winsome. It is too quiet. Men will jostle a Madonna who stands between them and a coryphée. Yet if the Madonna could only fascinate and attract them at first sight as the coryphée does, how much more they would admire and love her! It is all a question of initial fascination.

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With some such idea eddying through my mind, I went to a famous firm of manufacturing jewellers, and gave them a novel commission—to make me a necklace of ivory bells. I bade them spare no expense; no material to be used but the finest, most transparent ivory; the bells to be perfect and complete in every detail, even to the tiny, vibrant tongues; and all united by a chain of polished ivory links. "Even if the dream prove in no sense prophetic," I thought, "it has given me the idea of an absolutely unique ornament. I shall not be unnoticed when I wear it."

Four hundred pounds was the cost of my necklace. I am not wealthy, but I am not poor. I could pay the money, and I did.

Immediately a new experience came into my life. I became a centre of admiration! Hitherto, with other quiet, inconspicuous girls I had been comparatively unnoticed in company. But from the first occasion when I appeared wearing my necklace of ivory bells I was ringed about with admirers. And the most intoxicating part of it was that I really could not determine whether the ivory bells were the sole attraction or whether they had called out and emphasized some actual personal charm that made me admirable. I do not remember that a word was ever said to me in society about the ornament; society is too conventionally polite for that. But I wondered, especially when the men thronged about me, whether they were looking at the exquisite workmanship of the bells or at the girl who wore them.

It was during this brief season of social triumph that a revelation came to me which accounted in large part for my disquietude of a year past. The prince had come! Indeed, he had been near me for a long time and I had not known that I loved him.

He was a silent man, a poet—some called him a dreamer. He went into society, not for pleasure's sake, but that he might study human nature, for the same reason that he went into the lumber camps of the North and the slums of the great cities.

The first time he came to me, at the dull tinkle of the ivory bells, I felt an almost overpowering desire to stretch out my strong young arms and sweep from before me all the simpering circle on whose outskirts he stood. Then for an instant—and the only time I can remember until the strange thing happened—he looked into my eyes, and I became as a child before him. Afterwards, as often as he came near me, such a rapturous thrill ran through my being that I could scarcely keep from crying out.

Yet he alone of all the hovering circle seemed most interested, not in me, but in the ivory bells. I continually caught him studying them, and the thought maddened me that he whose love meant all the world to me admired only the ornament on my neck.

One summer evening there was a grand ball given at an out-of-town villa. He and I were there with a great company of the gayest of the gay.

As usual, I wore my ivory bell, and, as usual, those who admired them or me—I could not tell which—gathered around me.

As the stifling night wore on and dance followed dance I grew faint and weary and felt as if I must have a breath of Heaven's pure air.

As I moved towards the wide-open French windows from which one could step upon the veranda, the poet crossed my path.

He stopped, and I saw that his eyes were fixed upon the ivory bells. Much as I loved him, I could almost have smitten him then.

He spoke:

"Are you going out for a breath of fresh air, Mademoiselle Diller? So was I. May I have the honour of accompanying you?"

The honour! My soul surged within me. I was about to return some stereotyped refusal when the thought came to me:

"Is not this the hour of fate? Yes! I will prove myself this night that it is the ivory bells alone he cares for."

So I put my hand upon his arm and together we went into the night! Could a thousand years blot out its memory? The stars twinkling so purely in the blue-black sky; the restful sighing of the trees; the patter of a fountain near by; the music floating out across the shrubbery.

"Let us go down by the lake," my companion said; "there we may rest and enjoy the coolness."

Down the terraces we went arm-in-arm. There was a trembling between us. I could not tell whether my hand wavered upon his arm or his arm shook under my hand. But when we reached the little artificial lake I sank upon a bench and he, standing a little aside, stood before me. Some gaudy lanterns not far away cast a faint glow over us.

The silence grew oppressive. Suddenly my spirit rose to the level of its purpose. I started up, withdrawing a little, and snatched the glistening circlet from my neck. The next instant it was flashing in the crystal water of the lake, sinking so slowly that it seemed to hang suspended in the tide like the golden goblet that the poet saw from the bridge at midnight.

Then I looked at my poet, and all of life trembled upon that instant. O gracious heavens! His eyes were fixed not upon the sinking bauble, but upon my face. Love had passed the crucial test. At that supreme moment something like the rushing darkness came over me—something with roaring wings as of a great bird. I fainted from the awful stress; but even as I sank I felt my lover's arms encircle me.

I have confessed. For me the world is made new and all things in it.

My poet smiles as I read him what I have written about the ivory bells. He declares that he never saw them in his life until they flashed from my hand that night into the lake.

If he seemed to look upon them, he swears it was because he dared not lift his eyes to the soul that burned in mine. The light had slain him, except it had been of love.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, August 12th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. G. Daniels, of 20 Princess Street, Accrington, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

JESS: "My chaperon has been dismissed, and an older one engaged." Bess: "You didn't have a difference of opinion, did you?" Jess: "Never; we always fell in love with the same man."

"I SAY, milkman, you give your cows too much salt." "Why, how do you know how much salt I give them?" "I judge from the appearance of the milk you have brought us lately. Salt makes the cows dry, and then they drink too much water—that makes their milk thin, you know."

"CLARA, dear, we've been careful so far, and I don't think they suspect we are just married. You must scold me a little now as we get off the train." (Sharply and in a high-pitched voice): "George, darling, when we get to the hotel you must certainly take off that absurd lavender necktie!"

"YOU should make allowances for Tomlinson. Any man is liable, you know, to act foolishly for a few days after he has become the father of a bouncing boy." "But great Scott, man, this is Barker's ninth!" "Oh, well, then there's all the more reason for making allowances. It's a wonder that he is able to control himself at all."

MRS. WYLES: "Did your husband give you anything for a birthday present?" Mrs. Styles: "Indeed he did." "Did it have your name on it?" "Yes, and my husband's name, too." "That's just like selfish man. He must share the gift with you." "But he didn't." "What was his name doing on it, then?" "It wouldn't have been any good without it. It was a cheque."

CAPTAIN CRUISER: "So your son is a little dissipated, eh?" Anxious Mother: "Oh, very, captain, very! What can I do with him?" Captain Cruiser: "Leave him to me. We sail from Liverpool for San Francisco next week, and won't touch port for some weeks!" Anxious Mother: "Yes; but it's whisky I'm afraid of."

*HE was a kind and a loving fellow, was Mr. Smiler, the cotton manufacturer of Accrington. He always allowed his employées full pay when off work through sickness, in consequence of which several of the men profited thereby in a sense, being members of a sick club which allowed 12s. per week during sickness. One morning, a little boy, who had overheard his parents talking at home, presented himself at Mr. Smiler's office, and said: "Please, Mr. Smiler, feyther's t' ill t' come t' wark. He's stopping off a fortnight ill, 'cos mother's going to mek rent straight."

GOOPH: "I tell you Mutt knows what he is talking about." Wooph: "Yes, but he talks about it constantly."

TEACHER: "How do you define the word 'gloaming' Dickey?" Dick Hicks (after reflection): "Something spoony that people go out and sit in."

MOTHER: "Well, my dear, I see you are engaged to Mr. Bashful at last." Daughter: "No, he hasn't proposed yet." "What? Not engaged? I saw you hugging and kissing him last night." "Y-e-s, I was trying to encourage him a little."

"BRIDGET! Bridget! why don't you bring up the lemonade?" said Mrs. O'Brien, on the first of July, from the top of the kitchen stairs. "Why, marm," said Bridget, wiping the sweat from her red face with her check apron, "you see the ice I put in the lemonade is so hard that it hasn't melted yet, although it's stirring it over the fire I've been for the last fifteen minutes or more."

IN a certain town in England stands a public-house with a well-known sign over the door, "When shall we *three* meet again?" and on the board the figures of two asses are painted. An Irishman could not reckon it up, only being two asses, and the sign saying three. He stood gazing at it a long time, and at last the landlord popped his head out of the window above. Pat's face lit up with a smile as he said: "I wondered where the other chap had gone to!"

LAST Christmas a couple of fellows were sleeping in camp in Canada, and towards morning one of them awoke shivering with cold, and found the fire low, and his comrade fast asleep. He didn't like getting up to stir the fire, so he gave his bed-fellow a kick, and pretended to be asleep, thinking his companion would awaken, feel cold, and get up to stir the fire. There was no response, so he gave him another; then the supposed sleeper burst out laughing, and said: "I tried that on you a few minutes ago. That's why you woke up."

A YOUNG man who wished to be appointed a county police-constable put in an appearance one morning accompanied by his mother, and was taken in hand for examination by the inspector. This progressed satisfactorily, until the inspector observed: "Of course, you are aware you'll have a lot of night-work to do? You are not afraid of being out late, I suppose?" Before the candidate could reply, his mother electrified the official with the statement: "That'll be all right, sir, never fear; his grandmother's going round with him the first two or three nights until he gets used to it."

AN English curate, while visiting a friend who was a magistrate, was shown by the latter the county gaol. The curate was much interested in the working of the treadmill, declaring to his friend that he wished he had one at home to give him the gentle exercise he needed, but was too lazy to take except under compulsion. The magistrate smiled and shook his head. To remove the former's scepticism, the curate asked to be allowed a turn. Round went the wheel, the curate declaring the movement delightful; but after three minutes he had had enough, and called to the warder to stop the treadmill. To his dismay, the warder answered, "Truly sorry, sir, I can't. It's timed to go fifteen minutes, and it won't stop before!"

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthral you.

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IN A YEAR'S COOKERY

The question naturally arises, "What is the Best Beverage to place upon the Breakfast and Supper Table

Every Day of the Year?"

Without a doubt the drink which is most generally recommended by the leading Medical Practitioners of the present enlightened age is a really Good Cocoa.

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PURE CONCENTRATED

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WHICH FOR PURITY, SOLUBILITY, AND EXCELLENCE CANNOT BE SURPASSED.

Fry's Cocoa and Chocolates are used and recommended by that celebrated specialist, Mrs. A. B. Marshall.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

This week you will find another fascinating story of Hazel Harlow, the beautiful actress, whose adventures are being recounted from week to week. I shall be obliged if you will tell your friends about them.

Remember that the scene of these stories will be shifting constantly from place to place, and that when Hazel Harlow comes to your own town, there will be added interest for you in the adventures.

❦❦❦

David R. Ryan (Dublin) writes: "Have not all your readers been supplied with stereoscopes ere this? Why not give us a chance of a few novels in connection with the Postcard Competition?"

I will think the suggestion over. Meantime, what do other readers think?

❦❦❦

From the Royal Mail Steamship *Kildonan Castle* "F. J. W." tells me that he is on his way from South Africa to England, and wants to know where he could spend a nice, quiet, rural holiday not too far from London.

I conclude that my correspondent wants an *inland* place, and if this is so, he cannot do better than go to some Surrey, Kent, or Sussex village. The neighbourhood of Sevenoaks, in Kent, is charming and beautiful enough for anybody. And withal it is only twenty-two miles from London on the South Eastern Railway. Dorking, in Surrey, is another charming spot. I hope my correspondent will enjoy his holiday, wherever he goes.

❦❦❦

"One who Appreciates a Good Story" can obtain back numbers containing the previous chapters of "The Golden Dwarf" by applying to the Publisher, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C.

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Love, Courtship and Marriage.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"R. W. S." has been "keeping company" with a girl for several months. Seven times she has broken it off for no particular reason. "I love her still very dearly, and she wants to make it up again. Am I to trust her for an eighth time?"

Well, if I were you, "R. W. S.," I should have a very straight talk with her. Be gentle, but firm. Tell her that her continual "breakings-off" are occasioning you a lot of unhappiness, and she must make up her mind what she wants to do. Don't get angry with her, and don't bully her, but let her know plainly that you want a proper understanding.

Your ideas concerning the treatment of wives in Turkey are not quite correct, "Jack." Of course, there are exceptions; but the law looks after them more than you think. A Turkish woman may leave her husband, if she has cause, and the law will uphold her action and protect her. She cannot be compelled to work for her husband's maintenance; but he is bound to support her, and if he insults or ill-treats her he is liable to imprisonment. The customs in Turkey are different from ours, and, therefore, appear strange to us; but you must remember that our ways are just as strange to them.

You say, "Charlie's Own," that you are very much attached to a young man, three years your junior, but your parents will not allow you to go out with him, or be engaged to him. They know nothing against him except he is of a very jealous disposition, and are afraid he would not make you happy, and you ask my advice as to what is the best thing for you to do.

I should go to your parents, and ask them plainly to state whether they have any real reason for their dislike of the young man, and if they have no good reason to give you, tell them that, being of age, you have settled to become engaged to him, as he is the only man you really love. I never believe in girls setting themselves up to know better than their parents, but there are times when it is right and just that a sensible girl should be allowed to judge for herself, and, from what you tell me, I think this is one of them. Be quite sure he is an honest, straightforward, manly man, and if there is any good reason why you should not be engaged to him, face it bravely, and do your best to forget all about him.

"Zelia" belongs to a troupe of acrobats, and, until a few months ago, was perfectly happy and contented. Now she is miserable, because her supposed mother has told her that she is not her child at all, but was stolen when a baby from her home. She has always been very well treated, and loves her adopted parents dearly, but now she cannot help feeling that most likely she was born to fill a higher sphere than the one she now occupies, and longs to know who her real parents are.

If you are fond of the people you live with, and they are so good to you, "Zelia," I should advise you to be content as you are. Perhaps you will only find, after all, that your own people were ashamed of your bringing up, and it is also quite likely that they are not in as good a position as you seem to think likely.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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